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SKETCHES OF SERMONS

PREACHED TO CONGREGATIONS

IN VARIOUS PARTS OF GREAT BRITAIN,

AND ON THE

EUROPEAN CONTINENT;

FURNISHED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE AUTHORS.

"So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."—*Nehemiah* viii, 8.

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD VOLUME.

HAVING so fully and so unequivocally expressed our sentiments in a preface to the first volume of the Sketches of Sermons, we deem it totally unnecessary to trespass on the patience of our readers, by any lengthened observations on the present occasion: but considering the favourable notice taken of our Work in several highly respectable periodical journals,* and the extended patronage it has received, it might seem uncourteous in us to commit a third volume to the press, without expressing the high sense we entertain of the obligation we are under to a generous and discerning public.

Our first volume was sent into the world without a patron, or a name, or any thing to recommend it, except its own intrinsic character; but such has been the reception it has met with, that a *third* edition has been called for; and we flatter ourselves that the subsequent parts of the Work have not been deemed less worthy of the public patronage.

In our choice of subjects, we have invariably aimed at promoting usefulness, rather than exciting curiosity. The minor subjects of theological controversy, which have too frequently agitated the Christian world, we have studiously avoided: and though we cannot aver, that every Christian minister will find the whole of his religious creed embodied in these volumes, yet we

* See Imperial Magazine, December 1820; Evangelical Magazine, March, 1821; Eclectic Review, Nov. 1821; New Evangelical Magazine, January, 1822; Methodist Magazine, May, 1822.

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would fain persuade ourselves, that he will find few things in them to which he cannot cordially subscribe. We have also studied plainness and perspicuity, both in the phraseology and arrangement of the Sketches. The individuals composing country congregations, to which, in a more extended form, they were delivered, are, for want of being habituated to think closely, frequently incapable of comprehending subjects, presented in a logical form, and habited in a metaphysical garb; and in preaching to such, the example of the apostle, who used "great plainness of speech," cannot be too closely copied. Not that we wish to advocate the cause of rusticity, or to recommend a low vulgar style of preaching, that offends rather than conciliates, and excites prejudice rather than attention: religious truth should appear in its native simplicity; but its ministers should learn to discriminate between real beauties, and meretricious decorations; between the ornamental clothing, and the tawdry vestment.

Since the publication of our first volume, one of the contributors has been called by the great Head of the Church to his eternal reward. Another has been so deeply afflicted, as to be rendered incapable of furnishing any materials for the present volume; but arrangements are made, not only for filling up their places, but also for *enlarging* the number of contributors to ten, which was their original design; and on this account they venture to indulge a hope that, in *variety* of matter, the fourth volume will *surpass* all that have preceded it.

'Truth is great, and will prevail;' and it never urges its claims more forcibly, nor more successfully, than when it comes from the heart of a man deeply imbued with its spirit, and impressed with its importance.

Whatever preparations may be made for the pulpit, or by whatever attractions the ministerial office may be surrounded, without that fervour, and pathos, and those feelings of deep responsibility which the Holy Ghost alone can inspire, the practice of preaching will be little better than the sound of a well tuned instrument, which, though it charms while it is heard, will leave no traces behind. But it is a pleasing circumstance, that there never was a period when the ministers of the sanctuary were more deeply sensible of the indispensible necessity of securing the influences of the Holy Ghost in order to render their labours successful, than at the present. May that Spirit be poured upon them from on high; that he that ministereth may do it as of the ability that God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise, and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

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I.—*The Nature and Obstructions of Divine Worship.*

GENESIS XV, 11.

"And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away."

THE existence of a supreme 'First Cause,' appears to have been an object of general belief in every age of time. Even those nations which were not favoured with the luminous rays of revealed truth, have, by the dull gleam of nature's lamp, possessed some confused notions of the Deity, and of the homage due to this "unknown God;" hence the multifarious attempts at propitiation, which are connected with the superstitious rituals of heathenism. Revelation meets this confused idea, and pours a refulgence of light on the mind, developing the object, and describing the character of acceptable worship. The early recipients of revealed truth, the patriarchs, were favoured with a form of worship which was of Divine appointment, rural in its character, simple in its construction, and highly expressive in its sacrifices; for their animal oblations assumed the existence of guilt, and the necessity of expiation, strikingly prefiguring that victim of atonement, "who suffered (once for all) the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." One of these interesting patriarchal sacrifices is represented to our view in the chapter before us, together with an attendant obstruction, and the pious perseverance of the venerable worshipper.

In discussing this subject let us consider,

I. THE PATRIARCH'S SACRED ENGAGEMENT.

II. THE OPPOSITION WHICH HE HAD TO ENCOUNTER.

III. THE METHOD OF REPULSE WHICH HE ADOPTED.

I. Abram, "the friend of God," was engaged in the celebration of Divine worship, according to the regulations and provisions of the age in which he lived, and the revelation with which he was favoured; and his sacred exercise will furnish some general observations on the nature of acceptable worship.

1. *It is sincere in its subject.* A pure unmixed desire to hold communion with God, to experience an assimilation into his likeness, and to "render unto him according to the benefits

which we have received," is an essential characteristic of that worship which is acceptable in the sight of Jehovah. Without this honesty of principle, this purity of intention,—propriety of position, decency of deportment, and accuracy of expression, together with all that external parade, and those pompous appendages which man may choose to associate with religious exercises, are only an abomination in the eyes of that adorable Being who "looketh on the heart," Lev. x, 1—3; Isa. l, 13—15, and lxvi, 3; Acts v, 2—4; Heb. xi, 4.

2. *Simple in its composition.* The venerable and devout patriarch had constructed his rural altar, probably of earth and stones; he had selected and slain the required victims, and laid them in order, and in the lively exercise of faith, was waiting for the token of Divine approbation; here is nothing complex, nothing superfluous; the whole is plain, simple and unadorned; and the character of Christian worship, as described in the New Testament, transcends, in point of simplicity, even the artless oblations of patriarchal days; "*Wherever* two or three are gathered together *in my name*, there am I in the midst of them," Matt. xviii, 20. No local peculiarities are required, no architectural grandeur enjoined, no parade of title, no splendid vestments, no pompous cavalcades, are associated with that form of worship which the Divine author of Christianity has furnished; all is native, heaven-born simplicity, consisting of *praise* and *prayer*, 1 Cor. xiv, 15; Eph. v, 19; Col. iii, 16.—Private, Matt. vi, 6.—Domestic, Josh. xxiv, 15; Jer. x, 25.—Social, Mal. iii, 16; Acts xii, 12.

3. *Sacrificial in its medium.* The claims of Divine justice and its glorious and inflexible character are such, that sinful man cannot possibly hold communion with the Deity, except through the intervention of an all-sufficient propitiatory victim. Neither praise nor prayer can meet with acceptance in the sight of God but through the sacrifice and intercession of HIM who "bare our sins in his own body on the tree." This is evident from—the nature of the paradisaical law—the demands of justice—and the entire inability of man, John xiv, 6; Heb. iv, 15, 16, and vii, 25; 1 John ii, 1.

4. *Essential in its character.* It is utterly impossible for man to enjoy true happiness, without maintaining communion with God, who is the only source of "every good and perfect gift." But the importance of Divine worship may be farther demonstrated, if we refer to the authority of Jehovah, Exod. xx, 2–4;—the recommendation of angels, Rev. xxii, 9;—the employment

of the inhabitants of the heavenly world, Rev. xix, 4;—the pious example of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and good men in every age of time;—and the benefits resulting from this holy exercise, Rom. viii, 32; Isa. xl, 31; James i, 5. Whilst the pious patriarch was offering his oblation, difficulties presented themselves: this leads us to consider,

II. THE OPPOSITION WHICH HE HAD TO ENCOUNTER. "The fowls," &c. The scene of Abram's sacrifice was the resort of carnivorous birds, which being attracted by the smell of blood, from his newly slain victims, hovered around his altar, in order, if possible, to prey on the carcasses; this gave the pious worshipper some trouble, for he considered it a matter of great importance to preserve his offering from pollution. Difficulties in maintaining communion with the Deity are not peculiar to patriarchal times; the Christian worshipper has to encounter nterruption, though of a different nature.

1. *Distracting dissipating thoughts* very frequently assail the Christian worshipper in his approach to the mercy seat; whether in his closet, at his domestic altar, or in the house of prayer; the retrospect of the past; the anticipations of the future; his various secular engagements; the affairs of others, with a thousand things equally inimical to spiritual worship, present themselves, and would occupy the mind.

2. *Pride, that baneful source of evil*, would very frequently obtrude on the Christian in his most sacred engagements, to pollute and spoil his sacrifice; the pride of supposed merit—the pride of human reason—the pride of talent—the pride of science, are like the carnivorous birds to Abram, harassing the minister, the elder, thel eader, and the private member of religious communities.

3. *Envy or uncharitableness*, constitutes another common principle of opposition to the Christian worshipper, referring to the talents, popularity, and success of others; condemning the motives, and depreciating the real excellence of our Christian brethren.

4. *Supineness and unbelief* form other impediments to the Christian worshipper, which have very frequently a powerful influence: a strange languor of mind, and inactivity of soul, possess the man; and various doubts and fears harass him, and frequently the *present* blessing is not received, through a want of the powerful energy of faith, Mark xi, 24; Luke xiii, 24; Heb. iii, 12; Rev. iii, 16.

III. THE METHOD OF REPULSE WHICH HE ADOPTED. "He

drove," &c. This conduct naturally suggests the ideas of *watchfulness—decision—diligence*—and *perseverance*.

1. *Watchfulness.* Imagination pictures the devout patriarch as alternately glancing at the birds of prey—at his humble altar—and towards heaven. The Christian worshipper must watch *against* the influence of sensual objects, and the operations of depraved nature—*over* the emotions of the mind—and *for* the reception of spiritual good, Prov. iv, 23; Eccles. v, 1; Mark xiii, 37.

2. *Decision.* We find no disposition to capitulate on the part of Abram—here is no hesitancy of mind evinced. So the Christian worshipper must adhere inflexibly to his point, and stand firm against every emotion, insinuation, and allurement, inimical to his sacred exercise.

3. *Diligence* is equally necessary, in order to resist the influence of this opposition; *watchfulness* and *decision*, in order to produce effect, must be aided by active application, not only firmness, but also resistance; this implies the steady repulsion and pursuit of evil; a holy breathing of soul; and the lively exercise of faith, 2 Pet. i, 5—10; 2 Pet. iii, 14.

4. *Perseverance.* The pious supplicant of the "throne of grace" must not be watchful, decided, and diligent for a time only, but he must persevere till he realizes his object, and obtains the blessing; yea, till he terminates his course, and receives the victor's crown, Gen. xxxii, 26; Rev. ii, 10.

Learn hence, 1. The heinousness of the sin of idolatry.

2. The reason of our frequent barrenness of soul.

3. The importance of an intimate acquaintance with our own hearts.

OMICRON.

II. *The Invitation of Moses to Hobab.*

NUMBERS X, 29.

"We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel."

THE text was primarily addressed by Moses to "Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses's father-in-law." There has been some doubt entertained as to the identical person described by this name. In Exod. iii, 1, Moses's father-in-law, who was the priest of Midian, is called Jethro: and in Exod. ii, 18, he is called Reuel. Some have thought that Raguel was the father of Jethro; and Jethro the father of Hobab. But the most reasonable way of accounting for this is, that Jethro and Raguel, or Reul, (for the Hebrew is the same in both places,) were two names to describe the same person: this was by no means a singular case; many of the ancients had two different names. See Daniel i, 6, 7; Matt. x, 2, 3. Hobab, therefore, to whom the statement in the text was made, and the invitation given, was the brother-in-law of Moses.—That we may profit by this passage, we will deduce from it the following observations:—

I. THAT GOD'S ISRAEL HAVE A DIRECT OBJECT IN VIEW, thus described; "The place of which the LORD said, I will give it you." By God's Israel, I mean *literally* the posterity of Jacob, and *spiritually* all genuine Christians, who are "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile." The object which God's ancient Israel had in view was Canaan; this is described as a *place*, and on several accounts it was highly desirable. Heaven is the glorious object on which God's spiritual Israel have fixed their attention. Canaan was highly prized by the Jews.

1. *As it was the end of their journey.* "We are journeying unto the *place*," &c. And when we recollect that they had to journey through a "terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought," and dangers innumerable; we are not surprised to find, that they highly valued the country to which they were tending. Heaven is the termination of the Christian's journey. The dangers of that terrible

wilderness through which Israel passed, were but faintly typical of the spiritual dangers to which believers are exposed; and if Israel rejoiced at the possession of Canaan, with what exultation will Christians enter their heavenly inheritance, when their toils will be finished, and their conflicts closed.

2. *It was a country amply stored with provisions.* It was "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, of oil, olives, and honey;" where they were to eat bread without scarceness, and not lack any thing, Deut. viii, 8, 9. Oh how unlike the dreary desolate wilderness through which they had to pass. But with all the encomiums bestowed upon Canaan, how low it sinks in comparison with that "better country," to which we are journeying! This, indeed, is a land without scarceness. Here will be no lack of any thing. Here grows the tree of life laden with immortal fruit. Here flow rivers of perennial pleasure. Here the glorified inhabitants shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. Here every wish shall be gratified, and every desire be crowned with enjoyment.

3. *It was long and repeatedly promised.* More than four hundred years before Israel actually took possession of Canaan, God had said to Abraham, "Unto thy seed will I give this land;" and the promises of God concerning it, were repeatedly renewed. Heaven is also a promised land; promised as a *kingdom*, Luke xii, 32;—as a *throne*, Rev. iii, 21;—as a *crown*, 2 Tim. iv, 8; Rev. ii, 10;—and as *eternal life*, 2 John ii, 25.

4. *It was to be gratuitously bestowed.* It was "the place of which the Lord said, "I will give it you." Israel were uniformly taught to believe, that it was not for their own righteousness, that God would bring them in to possess the land, Deut. ix, 5, 6; Psa. xliv, 3. Our heavenly inheritance will be freely given. All God's blessings are gifts. God gave his Son, John iii, 16. He gives his Spirit, Luke xi, 13. He gives repentance, 2 Tim. ii, 15. And eternal life, Rom. vi, 23.

II. THAT GOD'S ISRAEL ARE TENDING TOWARDS THAT OBJECT. "We are journeying," &c. In this journey we remark three things:

1. *It was commenced by the command of God.* Oppressed as Israel were in Egypt, and bitter as their lives were rendered by the cruel usage and hard bondage to which they were subject; we have no reason to believe that they would have made one effort to escape from the land of their captivity, if God had not commanded them to depart, Exod. iii, 7—9. Our bondage is of

a more degraded character, and our taskmasters of more merciless dispositions; yet how unwilling are we to escape from their tyrannical sway! But at the command of God we commence our Christian journey, Matt. vii, 13. We forsake sin—take up our cross—bring forth fruits meet for repentance—believe in Christ, and direct our steps towards a city of habitation,—all in obedience to the authority of heaven.

2. *It was continued under his immediate guidance.* The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, Exod. xiii, 18, 21, 22. This was a most extraordinary phenomenon; a cloud that always maintained its station over the tabernacle—that preserved the same invariable form—that regulated all the movements of Israel, and never left them, even amidst their provocations. Christians are as much under the guidance of Heaven as Israel of old. Jesus is our leader, commander, and pattern, Isa. lv, 4; 1 Pet. ii, 21. The Holy Ghost is our guide, John xvi, 13. And by attending to the example of Christ, and the teachings of His Spirit, in our minds and in his word, we shall as certainly reach our heavenly inheritance as Israel arrived at Canaan.

3. *It was marked by his miraculous and gracious care.* Never were there a people more remarkably defended than Israel. They were exposed to innumerable dangers, and assailed by the most formidable enemies; but the eternal God was their refuge, Deut. xxxiii, 27. The enemies of Christians are also numerous, sagacious, and powerful; but God is their refuge and strength; and their path is marked by his providential and gracious care, Matt. x, 30; Heb. xiii, 6.

III. THAT GOD'S ISRAEL ARE SOLICITOUS TO SECURE COMPANIONS FOR THEIR JOURNEY. "Come thou with us," &c.

1. *Piety prompts them to say this.* They look around and see how God is dishonoured by thousands of his rational creatures. His laws are violated, his Spirit is grieved, and his name blasphemed—and the love they have for God excites the deepest feelings of sorrow in their hearts, Psa. cxix, 158, and cxxxix, 21. Hence they long to bring back to God his immortal offspring, and to recover to "the Great Shepherd of the sheep," the souls for whom he died; and they say, "Come thou with us," &c.

2. *Benevolence excites them to say this.* Religion inspires the most ardent attachment to God, and breathes the purest benevolence to men. Christians feel for others, and they say to their friends and neighbours—"Come with us and we will do you good." God's Israel do good to those who are journeying with

them. *They instruct them by their pious counsels.* When we first cast in our lot among them, we were ignorant of the difficulties, the dangers, and the intricacies of the way—of the devices of Satan, of the snares of the world, and of the deceitfulness of our hearts; we knew but little, but the conversation of Christians ministered instruction to us; they taught us what we had to expect—what to shun—and what to follow. *They console them by their fervent prayers.* Discouragements will ever beset their path, and stones of stumbling and rocks of offence lie in their way; but when they are ready to faint in their minds, the prayers of the pious will hold up their hands, and inspire them with renewed courage. *They urge them onward by their heroic example.* See this exemplified in the case of Caleb, Numb. xiii, 30.

3. *Self-interest induces them to say this.* God's Israel are not only capable of doing good to, but of receiving good from their fellow-travellers. Moses knew that Hobab could be of service to Israel; see ver. 31.—'They who are led by miracle must not slight the ordinary means of instruction.' We have the Word and Spirit of God to teach us; but we gladly receive advice from ministers, and Christians, and friends; and therefore on our own account, we say individually to our neighbours, "Come thou with us," &c. Are Christians soldiers? Oh how gladly they behold the army of their glorious Captain swelled with recruits from the camp of the enemy! Are they travellers? How delighted are they to hear their neighbours asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, and saying, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

IV. THAT GOD'S ISRAEL ENJOY THE DIVINE COMMENDATION. "The LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel."

1. *Concerning the country to which Israel are tending.* "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!" Psa. lxxxvii, 3. And if the earthly Jerusalem merited such an encomium, how surpassingly glorious is the heavenly Jerusalem! See Rev. xxi, 23—26.

2. *Concerning the way in which Israel are journeying.* It is called a right way, 1 Sam. xii, 23;—a good way, Jer. vi, 16;—a perfect way, Psa. ci, 2;—a way of holiness, Isa. xxxv, 8;—a way of peace, Luke i, 79;—a new and living way, Heb. x, 20;—and a way in which there is no death, Prov. xii, 28.

3. *Concerning the succours afforded them in the way.* Many things are necessary for travellers. Light to see the way, Prov. iv, 18;—a consciousness of being in the right way, Isa. xxx,

21;—a guide to instruct us in the way, Psa. xxxii, 8;—provision for the way, Psa. cxxxii, 15;—strength to walk in the way, Isa. xl, 29—31;—and a never failing friend to lead us forward in the way, Isa. xlii, 16.

4. "The Lord hath spoken good concerning *Israel*,"—In the titles by which they are designated, such as children of God—sons of God—heirs of God—kings and priests unto God. In the figures by which they are compared; God's husbandry—God's building—God's heritage—sheep of God's pasture—a royal priesthood—a spiritual house—a crown of glory, and a royal diadem, &c. In the promises to which they are entitled:—these include all things, 1 Cor. iii, 21—23.

INFER.

1. *The happiness of God's people.* They are on their journey to heaven, and every step they take brings them nearer to their celestial habitation. Oh how pleasing the thought to be so near the paradise of God! What if they should meet with storms, or even tempests by the way!

'The rougher the blast, the sooner 'tis past;
The tempests that rise
Shall gloriously hurry them home to the skies.'

2. *The work of God's people.* They are to get as many with them as they can. They are to say, "Come with us:" they are to allure others by their example, teach them by their counsel, and encourage them by their prayers. They are not to invite others to go to heaven, and walk in a contrary direction themselves; but they are to go before, and invite others to follow them.

3. *The honour of God's people.* The Lord hath spoken good concerning them. Human praise is valued in proportion to the exalted character of the person who bestows it. Who esteems the plaudits of the vulgar, the ignorant, or the worthless? But oh! to have the praise of God, the commendation of Jehovah, what can be more exalted? or what so estimable? The revilings of men cannot harm you while God speaks good concerning you.

4. *The security of God's people.* "The Lord hath spoken good;" and not one word will fail of all that he hath spoken: only secure the commendation of God, and all will be yours; for if God be for you, who can be against you?

III.—*Balaam's Wish.*

NUMBERS xxiii, 10.

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

THERE is scarcely any thing which more clearly proves the depravity of human nature, than the war which we feel between principle and inclination. Few persons are so completely infatuated as to *approve of* all the wickedness they commit; and if there are such to be found, they must be regarded as instances of judicial blindness, inflicted by way of punishment for an abuse of talents: in which case, "Because men receive not the love of the (offered) truth, but take pleasure in unrighteousness, God sends them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie," 2 Thess. ii, 10—12. But it frequently happens, that, even during the time of temptation, the sinner's 'better judgment' protests against the evil to which his corrupt heart, nevertheless, inclines;—and more frequently, when the influence of temptation and "the pleasures of sin" are past, his soul is tormented with the loathing of self-condemnation, and the compunction of remorse.

Of these remarks Balaam furnishes an illustration. It is not improbable, that he had formerly been employed as a prophet of the true God; and that he had become famous in consequence of his predictions having been fulfilled. Balak, king of Moab, wished to engage him to devote the Israelites to destruction; in order to this he made him an offer of great riches and honour; Balaam felt and yielded to the temptation;—he "loved the wages of unrighteousness;" and therefore he inclined to go with the Moabitish princes. God, however, laid his injunction upon him; so that, instead of cursing Israel, he was constrained to bless them altogether; and in our text, condemning his conduct and himself, he says, "Let me die the death," &c. This wish we shall attempt to explain and to improve.

I. AN EXPLANATION OF THE WISH. "Let me," &c. Here we have to consider the character mentioned;—"*the righteous;*"—and that character in a particular state;—at the point of death.

1. *The character mentioned.* On this subject we observe

that righteousness means conformity to rule,—to God's rule;—which rule respects the hearts as well as the actions of men, Mark xii, 30, 31. From this rule all have departed. We have confessed as much for *ourselves*, in saying, "We have erred and strayed from thy ways," &c. And the Scripture declares as much concerning others, Rom. iii, 10-23.—This *crookedness* of *conduct* indicates *unrighteousness* of *disposition*—of *heart*;—which is *implied* in the promises and commands of the Bible. Ezek. xi, 19, and xviii, 31; and *asserted* in the declarations of Scripture, Matt. xv, 19; John iii, 3. Hence it clearly follows. that a "*righteous*" man is a *converted* man,—that he has been *changed* into what he now is. And since conversion is a thing of vast importance, Matt. xviii, 3, it is of great consequence to us that we be able to trace in *our own experience* the process of the necessary change;—by which he who is now righteous, has *seen* his unrighteousness. The Holy Spirit has "*convinced* him of *sin*," in both the *motives to*, and *prosecution of*, many amusements, and, perhaps, many transactions in business, which he before esteemed 'innocent;'—and has made what he before deemed sinful actions, appear *exceeding* sinful, Rom. vii, 13. He has also *felt* his unrighteousness. Many hear and talk much on what may be termed the lower branches of theology, such as man's depravity, weakness, &c, but appear to *feel* nothing. Not so the Psalmist, Psa. li, 8, and 17; and Peter's hearers, Acts ii, 37. The righteous man has *left* his unrighteousness, Isa. i, 16; 2 Cor. vi, 16. And moreover, his unrighteousness is *blotted out*, *covered*, *forgiven*, Psa. xxxii, 1, and li, 9: so that he is now *accounted* righteous. But this change is effected by a "faith of the *operation of God*," and which *purifies the heart*, Col. i, 12; Acts xv, 9,—whence the man is become *really* righteous; "*a new creature*;" partaker of "the *Divine nature*," and "the kingdom of God," &c, 2 Cor. v, 17; 2 Pet. i, 4; Rom. xiv, 17. And, finally, new principles producing their proper results; he is *practically* righteous, Luke vi, 45. Thus, on the one hand, we give God's grace the glory of our salvation, and on the other, prove that salvation is a *real*, *personal*, *present*, *experimental* and *practical* matter, 1 John i, 9; Rom. vi, 17, 18; 1 John ii, 29, and iii, 7. We have now to consider,

2. *This character under particular circumstances*;—at his "last end." Here we offer three remarks.

The death of the righteous is always safe;—wherever, whenever, however, it may happen; whether *suddenly*, *accidentally*, or otherwise, Psa. cxvi, 15; Rom. viii, 38.

The death of the righteous is generally peaceful. Satan is sometimes permitted to repeat his attacks, even in some of the last hours of life; but in some instances of this kind, if not in every one, he is obliged to retire before the moment of death. Psa. xxxvii, 37. So that even in such cases, as well as in others.

The death of the righteous is often triumphant, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. His last end, therefore, is the end of all his *afflictions, conflicts*, &c, and his introduction to *pure*, and *perfect*, and *eternal* bliss.

It would be too much to assert, that all this entered into Balaam's views. But this is the view afforded *us* by the light of our superior dispensation. Let us therefore attempt,

II. AN IMPROVEMENT OF THE WISH. In order to this we observe,

1. *To each of us this wish is highly proper;* "Let ME die, &c; because the object desired is *highly valuable;* inasmuch as it will afford *peace, comfort*, &c,—when *wealth, honour, friends*, &c, cannot;—because the object is *attainable*, Heb. iv, 13;—and because it is a necessary *pre-requisite* to our entering into heaven; and the only *preservative* from *perdition*. Die we *must;* and without it, be *damned*, John viii, 21.

2. *With most persons this wish is very common.* While the ministers of the gospel have been praying that the Lord would *spare* you to see his salvation,—or during the moments of *retirement* and *reflection*,—or when you have witnessed or heard of a very *miserable* or a very *happy death*, has not the wish escaped *your* heart? Yet,

3. *In most cases this wish is very unprofitable;* either because it is so *feeble* that it does not lead to a change of character, or so *transient* that it does not sustain that change. Remark Balaam's end, Josh. xiii, 22; and St. Peter's observation respecting him and his imitators, 2 Pet. ii, 15—22.

From these remarks we may learn the duty of both *sinners* and *saints*. The *former* should, 1. Meditate on this awful subject, Deut. xxxii, 29. 2. Convert the wish into a humble and hearty *prayer*, Psa. l, 15; Rom. x, 13. 3. Begin, *without delay* to *act* upon it, Matt. v, 29, 30. And, 4. *Continue* to meditate, to wait upon God, and to *live* the *life* of the righteous, Rom. ii, 7. And the *latter* should also, in respect of perseverance, "walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing," 1 Cor. xv, 58.

ZETA.

IV.—*The Memorable Deliverance.*

DEUT. xxiv, 18.

"But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing."

THE deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, is one of the most wonderful and instructive events recorded in the annals of revelation. Considered as a mere *historical fact*, it eminently displays the power and goodness of God in the liberation of his people from the oppressive yoke of their enemies. But when it is viewed as a *type* and *figure* of the believer's emancipation from the bondage of sin and Satan, it is infinitely more important and interesting to the pious mind. And *thus* it certainly *ought*, and may *very profitably* be regarded as furnishing many necessary and useful lessons of wisdom and piety, in the most striking similitudes and impressive representations. It is *thus* calculated to remind us of the enslaved and perishing state of mankind,—the nature and author of redemption,—and the various privileges and obligations of the redeemed. Accordingly therefore, to *this application* of the subject, we may consider the text as an *injunction* of the Divine Being, requiring all his people, *gratefully* to *recollect*, and *practically* to *exemplify* the benefits of redeeming love;—"But thou shalt remember," &c. In attempting an improvement of these words, we shall observe, the *deliverance* obtained—the *deliverer* described—and the *remembrance* enjoined.

I. THE DELIVERANCE OBTAINED;—"Thou wast a *bondman* in Egypt, and the Lord thy God *redeemed* thee thence." As the Lord ransomed the children of Israel from their Egyptian oppressors, so he graciously liberates his people from the more awful thraldom of their spiritual enemies. He redeems them.

1. *From the curse of the law.* The law of God is a glorious *transcript* and *exhibition* of his essential character and moral perfections.—It is "holy, just, and good;" and requires *universal* and *perfect* obedience. But we have all violated its precepts, and are therefore under its *condemning sentence*, and obnoxious to its *final penalties*, Gal. iii, 10; Rom. vi, 23. From this de

plorable state, the Lord delivers them that believe—"He that believeth is not condemned;"—his guilt is absolved—the sentence of the law is *cancelled*—and he is *fully justified* through faith in the Redeemer, Acts xiii, 39; Rom. viii, 1.

2. *From the bondage of sin.* The Saviour declares, that "Whosoever committeth sin, is the *servant* or slave of sin."—And as we have all sinned, we are naturally *tied* and *bound* with the fetters of our iniquities. Sin *reigns* in the hearts and lives of its obsequious votaries, Rom. vi, 12, 13, and 16. But from this *enslaved subjection* the Christian is happily liberated. His guilt is not only removed but the *galling yoke* of *corruption* is also destroyed.—Sin is completely *dethroned*, and "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life," Rom. vi, 14, 22, and xiv, 17.

3. *From the tyranny of Satan.* He is expressly called "the god of this world, and "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." His power is great and his kingdom extensive, 1 Pet. v, 8.—Yet the saints are emancipated from his influence, Luke xi, 21, 22.—He is cast out of their hearts, and though he tempts, they resist him steadfastly in the faith.—To them he is a *conquered foe;* for being rescued from his dominion, they are no longer taken captive by him at his will, Col. i, 13; Heb. ii, 14, 15.

4. *From the evils of the world.* The natural state of mankind is exceedingly corrupt and degenerate. Iniquity abounds, and the *captivating* riches, honours, pleasures, and maxims of this life, *ensnare* the *minds*, and *vitiate* the *habits* of the impenitent, Matt. xiii, 22; Luke xviii, 24, 25.—Redemption, however, from the world which lieth in wickedness, is the privilege of the righteous. They are convinced of its vanity and folly, and have escaped its snares and pollutions. They are saved from its *criminal fear* and *love*, and are not conformable to its *spirit* and *practices*, 2 Cor. vi, 17, 18; Gal. i, 4; 1 John ii, 15.—*Thus* God *hath* redeemed his people, and will *ultimately* rescue them from the sting of death—the power of the grave—and from eternal perdition. This will lead us to notice,

II. THE DELIVERER DESCRIBED.—"The Lord *thy God* redeemed thee thence." The eternal Jehovah was *peculiarly* the God of Israel, Exod. vi, 7.—He is still the God of his people, by the most *endearing relations*, and *precious promises*, Heb. viii, 10—12. Their redemption is eminently his work, being devised by his wisdom, and accomplished by his power.—It engages the joint agency of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

1. *Redemption originally proceeds from the mercy and love of God.* He "remembered the Jews in their low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever."—He has also propitiously regarded the ruined state of mankind, and provided a Saviour for us.—The scheme of redemption is a *glorious display* of the infinite *love* of God to sinners, Rom. v, 8.—His love is unmerited—unparalleled—and incomprehensible. "Behold, what manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us," John iii, 16; 1 John iv, 9, 10.

2. *Redemption is meritoriously procured by the Lord Jesus Christ.* To redeem the world, God must be honoured—his law magnified—and the *equity* of his moral government *maintained* and *displayed*. To accomplish these purposes, and become a ransom for sinners, the only-begotten Son of God took upon him the seed of Abraham—fulfilled all righteousness—was made the "propitiation for our sins"—and is now our perpetual advocate with the Father, "having obtained eternal redemption for us," Isaiah liii, 5; 1 Pet. i, 18, 19.

3. *Redemption is personally realized by the power of the Holy Ghost.* He reveals our true state; exhibits the person, character, and offices of the Saviour to the mind;—and enables the penitent to embrace him by saving faith, John xvi, 13, 14. Under *his* sacred *influences*, we are enlightened, subdued, renovated, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He applies the *merit* of Christ's death—the *efficacy* of his gospel—witnesses our adoption—purifies the heart—and seals the believer unto the day of *complete* redemption, 1 Cor. vi, 11; 2 Cor. iii, 17, 18. What a glorious salvation! Behold the matchless achievement of the triune God! How important and interesting then, is,

III. THE REMEMBRANCE ENJOINED;—"Thou shalt remember," &c. This command is applicable to the people of God in every age, and extends to all the blessings we receive. As it regards our *redemption*, we must cherish,

1. *A grateful remembrance.* We should frequently call to mind, the *deplorable state* from which we are redeemed;—the *inestimable privileges* with which we are honoured;—and the *ineffable felicities* to which we are entitled.—*Such* pious reflections will always be profitable, and associated with deep humility—devoted admiration—unfeigned gratitude—and fervent praise, Psa. ciii, 1—4; Isa. vii, 1.

2. *An affectionate remembrance.* A consciousness of the unspeakable love of God to us, should *deeply interest*, and

inspire our souls with a reciprocation of love to him. We certainly ought to love him, because he hath *first loved us*.—Our love to God must be supreme—vigorous—manifest—and progressive. It must be the *ruling principle* of the heart, and the *actuating motive* of the life, Matt. xxii, 37, 38; Rom. v, 5; 1 John v, 3.

3. *An obedient remembrance.* This is the specific argument of the text,—"Thou shalt *remember—therefore I command thee to do this thing.*" Their obedience was demanded on the ground of *Divine goodness.* We are all under innumerable obligations to obey the voice of God;—but the work of redemption is eminently *designed* and *calculated* to promote *unreserved obedience* to him "who loved us, and gave himself for us," 1 Cor. vi, 19, 20; 2 Cor. v, 14, 15.

4. *A perpetual remembrance.* Redeeming grace deeply involves our immortal interests, and therefore should never be forgotten. We ought *invariably* to retain a *lively sense* of it in our minds. It can never be an unseasonable or uninteresting subject. It suggests many *important instructions*, and inspires the most *encouraging prospects.* It will constitute the blissful and triumphant theme of the redeemed around the throne of God for ever and ever, Rev. i, 5, 6.—May we participate their joys—unite in their hallelujahs—and eternally ascribe, "glory, honour, and salvation, unto God that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb which was slain for us."

ETA.

V.—*Ruth's pious and exemplary Choice.*

RUTH i, 16.

"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

IN this chapter, we find an interesting and affecting account,

1. *Of Naomi's affliction.* This we may observe—was *great and complicated.* She was afflicted first with famine, ver. 1;—then with estrangement from her native land, v. 1, 2;—then with grievous bereavements, of her husband and sons, v. 3—5;—and finally, with poverty and want, v. 19—21. But her affliction—is also *instructive:* it teaches us, that *God's greatest favourites are not exempted from affliction*, Psa. xxxiv, 19. This

is always appointed for their *profit*, Heb. xii, 10; being designed —to wean them from inordinate attachment to earth, Mic. ii, 10; —to restrain them from sinful wanderings, Psa. cxix, 67;—to improve their graces by exercise, Rom. v, 3—5; James i, 2, 3; —and sometimes to promote their usefulness, 2 Cor. i, 4. Thus the captivity of a certain little maid, was no doubt considered a great affliction, both by her and her connexions; but hereby she became instrumental of great good, 2 Kings v, 2, 3.—So also in this case, Naomi's affliction proved the means of Ruth's conversion. We also find in the chapter before us, an account,

2. *Of Naomi's return to Judea*, v. 6, 7. In these verses we are reminded that *bread is the gift of God.*—It is not the production of *chance;* we should therefore acknowledge the hand of God in dispensing it, Gen. xlviii, 15.—It is not the certain effect of human *efforts;* in receiving it, we should therefore beware of arrogance. Habakkuk i, 16.—It is not the reward of human *merit;* we should therefore be thankful for it, Lam. iii, 22; Psa. lxviii, 19. Here we also find an account,

3. *Of Ruth's steadfast adherence to Naomi*, v. 7, 11, 13—17. This shows us, that *true friendship is constant in all its attachments.*—It is a *sacred fire*, which the floods of adversity cannot extinguish: Ruth clave to Naomi in adversity, as she had done in prosperity.—It is a *firm principle;* not to be shaken by examples of defection: Ruth clave to Naomi, when Orpah forsook her. We may say of friendship,—it is a *courageous virtue;* and begets the most undaunted resolution to mingle interests with its objects. This is evident from the language before us,—"And Ruth said, Entreat me not," &c. In improving our text, let us consider—The resolution expressed in it—And the propriety of this resolution, as an example for our imitation.

I. THE RESOLUTION EXPRESSED IN OUR TEXT;—"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." This example is certainly recorded for our imitation; and teaches us also, to choose the God of Israel for our God, and his people for our people. In doing this let us observe,

1. *Under what characters God should be chosen by us.*—We should choose him as our *guide;*—by adopting his word as the rule of our faith and practice, Psa. cxix, 30, 128;—by imploring his direction, Psa. xxxi, 3; James i, 5;—and by confidently expecting his guidance in all difficulties, Psa. xlviii, 14, and lxxiii, 24. We should choose him as our *sovereign;* by serious *attention* to his voice; and cheerful *subjection* to his will, Psa. xcv, 3, 5—8. We should choose him as our *strength;* by con-

fiding in him for assistance, support, and protection, Psalm. xviii, 1; Isa. xii, 2. We should choose him as our *Redeemer*; by looking to him for salvation from Satan and from sin, Is. xlv, 22; Psa. xix, 14. We should choose him as our *portion*; by seeking him as the God of *grace* in this world, Psa. lxiii, 1; Lam. iii, 23; and as the God of *glory* in the next, Psa. xxvii, 4; and lxxiii, 25. Having chosen God for our God, let us observe,

2. *What is implied in choosing God's people for our people. The people to be chosen are God's people*; those who turn to him as penitents; who trust in him by humble faith; who are received by him as his adopted children; who obey him as their father; and cleave to him as their benefactor, Deut. xxx, 19. 20. *That we may ascertain who are God's people, we should prove them by his word.* By this criterion, we should carefully examine their principles, experience, and deportment, James i, 25; 1 Thess. v, 21. Having proved them to be *God's people*, we should choose them for *our people, exclusively and entirely*:—*exclusively*, by renouncing and shunning the society of the wicked, Psa. i, 1;—and *entirely*, by a deliberate preference of God's people, in the formation of our *connections*; our religious, commercial, and domestic connections, should be selected from among the pious, Psa. xvi, 2, 3.—In the exercise of social *communications*, Psa. lxvi, 16; Mal. iii, 16; Heb. x, 24, 25.—In the distribution of our *beneficence*, Gal. vi, 10.—Having *chosen* them as our people, we should *retain* them as ours; *by inviolable attachment*, like that of Ruth to Naomi. To preserve affectionate unanimity is our Christian calling, Phil. i, 27. Such being the resolution here expressed, let us consider,

II. THE PROPRIETY OF IT, AS AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR IMITATION. This will evidently appear, on our observing,

1. *The advantages which result from choosing God as our God.* He then will choose us for his *people*. Deut. xxvi, 17. 18. And as such, he will *bless* us; for his blessing is on his people, Psa. iii, 8. He will bless us with *an interest in his care*, 1 Pet. v, 7; in his *providing* care, Psa. cxi, 5, 6; and in his *preserving* care, Psa. cxxv, 2.—He will bless us with *an interest in all his possessions*, 1 Cor. iii, 21-23.—He will bless us with *salvation from all our enemies*; from Satan, sin, the world and death, Deut. xxxiii, 29.—He will bless us with *a sanctified use of all the allotments of his providence*, Rom. viii, 28.—He will bless us with *peace in this world*, Psa. xxix, 11, xxxv, 8. and cxix, 165.—And with eternal *felicity in heaven*, Heb. iv, 9: Psa. xxviii, 9. For our farther encouragement, let us observe.

2. *The benefits arising from choosing God's people for our people.* These also are various; for hereby we shall be *taught the good old way*, Jer. vi, 16; Prov. xiii, 20.—We shall be *preserved from apostasy*, Heb. iii, 13.—We shall be *strengthened in all our exigencies;* in weakness, we shall obtain support, 1 Sam. xxiii, 16; in falls, we shall be assisted to rise; and in conflicts, we shall be enabled to overcome, Eccles. iv, 9–12.—We shall be *comforted in afflictions*, Job xxix, 25; 1 Thessalonians v, 11.—We shall be *rendered more extensively useful*, Prov. x, 21.—And we shall become *entitled to distinguished glory.* We may indeed admit, that in a state of chosen solitude, salvation may possibly be obtained; but it is certain from the word of God, that *social piety* is required by the most express command, Matt. v, 16; and encouraged by the most precious promises, Matt. xviii, 20, and xxv, 34—40.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let the choice of Ruth be your choice;* make it *immediately*, without delay, Job xxii, 21; *resolutely*, with unshaken purpose, Josh. xxiv, 15; and *perseveringly*, without declension, Psa. cxix, 106.

2. *You are urged to this by other good examples besides that of Ruth.*—By that of *Moses*, Heb. xi, 24—26; of *David*, Psa. cxix, 63; and of *Saul*, when converted to the religion of Jesus Christ, Acts ix, 26.

3. *You are encouraged to perseverance in it by the happiest results.* Witness the last words of Moses, Deut. xxxiii, 26—29; the blessings of Ruth, Ruth ii, 12; the glorious end of David, Acts xiii, 36; and the triumphs of Paul, 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8.

ALPHA.

VI.—*The Means prescribed by God for the Attainment of Good.*

JOB xxii, 21.

"Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee."

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1. IT appears from the contents of this book, that Job's friends who came to "mourn with him and to comfort him," instead of *alleviating* his distress, greatly *augmented* it, by their various conversations with him. This he felt most exquisitely; and of this he often complains in the most affecting language: "To him," says he, "that is afflicted, pity should be showed him from his friend; but he casteth off the fear of the Almighty.—Miserable comforters are ye all—my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God—Have pity upon me, O ye, my friends! for the hand of the Lord hath touched me."

2. That these men were truly upright and pious, and that they by no means *intended* to afflict Job unnecessarily, is evident from their whole deportment. But the harsh measures which they adopted arose from their *mistake*.—They concluded that no one could be afflicted as Job was, but by way of punishment for some enormous crimes.—They knew that Job's exterior conduct was without blemish. Hence, they hastily inferred, that he must have been a secret hypocritical offender; and, as such, they frequently charge and counsel him, for the manifest purpose of bringing him to what they considered requisite repentance. In proof of this, we find Eliphaz in this chapter, saying, "Is not thy wickedness great, and thine iniquities infinite?—Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee." And in perfect consistence with this view of Job's case, he urges him to a penitential return to God, in the paragraph now before us; "Acquaint now," &c. But however inapplicable these words were to Job, in the sense intended by his friend, they certainly contain—an exhortation of general importance to mankind, as sinners—enforced by a most encouraging promise.

I. AN EXHORTATION OF GENERAL IMPORTANCE TO MAN

KIND, AS SINNERS; "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." This exhortation to seek immediate acquaintance and peace with God, implies, that mankind, as sinners, are unacquainted, and at variance with God;—that acquaintance and peace with God are attainable blessings;—and that those blessings should be sought without delay.

1. *That mankind, as sinners, are unacquainted and at variance with God. They are unacquainted with God.* For they do not *know* God, 1 Cor. xv, 4. They are not *known*, or approved of, by God, Matt. vii, 23. They are *ignorant* of God's will, Rom. iii, 17. And they have no *communion* with God, Job xv, 4; Isa. lix, 2; Eph. ii, 12.—They are *at variance with God;* being at *enmity* against him in their hearts, Rom. iii, 7; and actually *rebellious* against him in their practice, Isa. i, 2. This variance, with its evidences and effects, we find strongly described by St. Paul, in this language;—"You were some time alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works," Col. i, 31.—Our text implies,

2. *That acquaintance and peace with God are attainable blessings.* They are certainly attainable by us—this is evident from God's word.—Because *ignorance* of God is threatened with *punishment;* which implies, that it is an avoidable crime, Isaiah, xxvii, 11; 2 Thess. i, 7-9.—The *knowledge* of God is generously *promised*, Prov. ii, 3, 4.—The method of *obtaining peace* with God is *prescribed*, Isa. xxvii, 5.—Sinners are *entreated* by God to be reconciled to him, 2 Cor. v, 20.—And penitents are *encouraged* to hope for peace, by the most gracious promises, Isa. lv, 6, 7. Hence our text implies,

3. *That these blessings should be sought without delay;* "Now."—This God evidently *requires;* for the time which he commands us to employ in seeking him, is always the present time, Luke xiv, 17; Acts xxii, 16; 2 Cor. vi, 2.—This we find recommended by the example of David, Psa. cxix, 59, 60.—To *delay is highly improper;* for it is *dangerous*—as it tends to harden your hearts, Psa. xcv, 7, 8; and as it is threatened with abandonment by God, Gen, vi, 3; Jer. vi, 8. And it is *inexcusable;* for the blessings of salvation are now ready to be dispensed by God, Rev. iii, 20; Isa. xxx, 18; Jer. vi, 16.—These declarations remind us that the exhortation before us is,

II. ENFORCED BY A MOST ENCOURAGING PROMISE. Thereby good shall come unto thee; all the good that can possibly arise,

1. *From acquaintance with the best of friends. Such a friend*

God is to his people, Prov. xviii, 24. In him we find the perfection of every quality we can wish in a friend; for he is all-sufficient, infinitely kind, ever present, and unchangeable, Psa. xviii, 30.—*He is the covenant friend of the upright*, Psa. lxxxiv, 11.—And *much good must arise from friendly acquaintance with him:* as ample *guidance*, Psa. xxv, 14, xlviii, 14; ready *assistance*, Isa. xli, 10; Heb. iv, 16; and unfailing *comfort*, Psa. xlvi, 1—11; Hab. iii, 17, 18. This promise also assures us of all the good that can arise,

2. *From subjection to the greatest and best of sovereigns.*—God is the *greatest* and *best* of sovereigns, Psa. xcv, 3, 6, 7.—He is great in *authority;* being subject to no control, Dan. iv, 35. He is great in *justice;* and is engaged to reward piety, Psa. lviii, 11.—He is great in *goodness;* and wills the happiness of his servants, Psa. xxxv, 27, and c, 5.—He is great in *knowledge;* and adapts his favours to the exigencies of his subjects, with the most exact propriety, 1 Sam. ii, 2; 2 Chron. xvi, 9.—And his *subjects* are *entitled* to the greatest *good*, Psa. xxxiv, 9, 10; even to all necessary provision, Matt. vi, 33; Psa. cxi, 5;—to secure *protection*, John x, 27, 28;—and to eternal *glory*, John xii, 26.

APPLICATION.

1. Acquaint *thyself* with God. Here consider, every one of you is interested in this command. All of you have *sinned*, Rom. iii, 23. God certainly desires your *salvation*, Ezek. xxxiii, 11. But unless you *seek* salvation you will never obtain it; for God's favours must be enquired after to be obtained, Ezek. xxxvi, 37; and negligent souls are exposed to his vengeance, Heb. ii, 3; 2 Thess. i, 7—9. Religion is a personal thing, and no one can enjoy it, without advantage, nor despise it with impunity, Prov. ix, 12.

2. Acquaint thyself with God, and be at *peace*. Rest not in any thing short of *assured peace* with God. Not in *correct views* of religion—not in a mere *outward reformation*—not in the expression or feeling of *good desires*—not in the external *form of godliness*.—You may go thus far, and yet be rejected at last, 2 Cor. v, 17; Gal. vi, 15. Faithfully examine yourselves, 2 Cor. xiii, 5.—Come to God by faith in Christ, Rom. v, 1; John xvi, 6.—Pray with Moses, Psa. xc, 14; and resolve with Jacob, Gen. xxxii, 26.

3. Acquaint *now* thyself with God, and be at peace. Now, while the Spirit of God strives—while the means of grace are enjoyed—while you have understanding to know God; health

and strength to serve him; and talents to employ for him, Matt. xxi, 26.

4. If now at peace with God, be concerned to *remain* at peace with him. Beware of declension; this displeases him, Heb. x, 38. Keep yourselves in his love, Jude 20, 21.

5. Thereby *good* shall come unto thee. No good can come to thee without this; see Jer. xvii, 5, 6. But on adopting the measures here prescribed, no good shall be withheld from thee. Good *shall* come to thee; for Christ has *purchased* it for thee; God has *promised* it to thee; and the *earnest* of it is already given thee, Psa. cxlv, 19. It shall come to thee through life, Psa. xxiii, 6; in death, Psa, lxxiii, 26; and to all eternity, Isa. xxxii, 17.

ALPHA.

VII.—*Solemn Warning.*

JOB XXXVI, 18.

"Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

THIS book is one of the most ancient portions of Divine revelation. But when, or by whom it was written, is not certainly known; though it is generally attributed to Moses during his abode in the land of Midian. It is evidently peculiar in its contents—sublime in its composition—and interesting in its descriptions. Various persons are represented as addressing each other, on the most solemn and important subjects. The principal characters introduced, are—the Divine Being—his servant Job—three old men—and Elihu, the speaker in the text. This amiable youth, having long sat silent to hear the others in their discourse, and finding that Job's friends could not answer him, he was powerfully constrained to speak, by the inspiration of the Almighty. He vindicates the wisdom and goodness of God,—and maintains that all his dealings with mankind are equitable and gracious,—though he gives no account of them to his creatures. He describes sin as the *original cause* of all affliction and sorrow; and, supposing Job to have forsaken the Lord and incurred his displeasure, he exhorts him to return to him, by immediate repentance, as the only way to escape impending ruin. "Because there is wrath," &c. Whether these words were suited to the case

of Job or not, they are certainly applicable to all impenitent sinners, and contain,

I. An important assertion;—"Because there is wrath." From this declaration it is evident that it has been known from the earliest ages, that God is displeased with sin, and has often revealed his anger against the ungodliness of men. And as all sin is an *abomination* in his sight, there is *still wrath with him*, against every careless sinner.

1. *This assertion must be explained.* When human *properties* and *passions* are attributed to the Deity, they cannot be understood in a *strict* and *literal* sense. The *hands*, the *eyes*, and the *ears* of the Lord, are familiar representations of the perfections of his character, wisely adapted to the grasp of finite comprehension. The *anger*, *hatred*, and *wrath* of God, are not *impure passions* in Him, as they are in man: he is an infinitely pure Spirit, and changeth not—his *wrath* signifies his *holy indignation against sin—and his righteous determination to punish the finally impenitent*, Rom. ii, 18. He is essentially *holy*, *just*, and *good;* and, therefore, he cannot approve of any thing sinful, and opposed to the purity of his nature, and declarations of his will;—he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. All who violate the precepts of his law become obnoxious to its awful penalties, and justly incur the *punitive wrath* of the Divine Lawgiver, Rom. ii, 3—9.

2. *This assertion must be confirmed.* How does it appear that there is wrath with God? and what is the cause of it? This is evident from the Scriptures, which assure us, that the Lord is "angry with the wicked—for he hateth the workers of iniquity —and his face is against them that do evil." His wrath is said to be *kindled*, to *wax hot*, and to *burn like fire*, against the incorrigible. The cause of his holy displeasure is *sin;* for "all have sinned and come short of his glory," and are, therefore, "children of wrath," and heirs of destruction. What ingratitude, uncleanness, pride, unbelief, and innumerable iniquities, abound in every nation, and reign among all orders of men, Rom. iii, 10—18. For these things the wrath of God now cometh on the children of disobedience; and when "the great day of his wrath is come, who shall be able to stand?" But now it is possible to escape the second death, and secure eternal life; and for this purpose the text enforces,

II. An affectionate admonition;—"Because there is wrath, *beware!*" This expression is highly emphatic and comprehensive, and implies both the *exercise of caution*, and the *pursuit of salvation*. It enjoins,

1. *The exercise of caution.* "Beware!" Deeply consider your state and character before God—remember your awful responsibility, and the intimate connection which subsists between a state of mortal probation and eternal retribution, Gal. vi, 7, 8;—be wise, and know the day of your visitation—be cautious, and duly regard your souls and religion—beware of an impenitent and unbelieving heart, Heb. iii, 12;—of despising the goodness and mercy of God, Rom. ii, 4;—of neglecting your salvation, and being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, Heb. iii, 13;—of the fascinating vanities of this present evil world, 1 John ii, 15–17;—of the subtilty and snares of the wicked one, 1 Pet. v, 8;—of assuming the mere form of godliness, and procrastinating your immortal interests, Acts xxiv, 25. Take seasonable warning—be tremblingly alive to danger—abandon every evil—escape for your life! The text suggests,

2. *The pursuit of salvation.* An apprehension of Divine wrath should induce a diligent use of the means appointed for our deliverance; this is the only way of being rescued from sin and ruin. However deplorable our state may be, we are not beyond the reach of mercy—the anger of God may be turned away from us, Isa. xii, 1. An all-sufficient Saviour is provided, and salvation is *possible* and *promised* to the vilest sinners: but to be saved it is necessary to *repent* and *believe* the gospel, Mark i, 15. Embrace the present season, and "seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." Consider the *value* of your souls—the *necessity* of holiness—the *horrors* of destruction—and the *felicities* of heaven. Behold the love of God to mankind, and bow to the cross of the crucified Redeemer! Receive him by faith, and thus "flee from the wrath to come, by laying hold upon the hope set before you." As a powerful excitement to such conduct, our text urges,

III. AN IMPRESSIVE ARGUMENT;—"Lest he take thee away," &c. This argument is *twofold*, and represents the awful consequences of sin, in the *certainty* and *perpetuity* of the sinner's destruction.

1. *The sinner's punishment is inevitable.* "Lest he take thee away with his stroke." Incorrigible impenitence leads to unavoidable ruin, Rom. vi, 21; sin will surely find us out, for "the wicked shall not go unpunished." *His stroke* signifies *a sudden calamity or awful judgment;* with *such strokes* he has taken away many in all ages, as warnings to mankind. Such was the deluge—the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah—the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—the death of Herod,

Ananias, and Sapphira, &c, Gen. vii, and xix, 27—29; Numb. xvi, 31—33; Acts v, 1—10, and xii, 20—23. But if the ungodly escape such calamities in *this world*, they speedily will be driven away in their wickedness, to everlasting destruction, Psa. ix, 17; Prov. i, 24—31. Tremble, ye stout-hearted sinners! the wrath of God abideth on you, and without repentance you must suddenly perish, and that without remedy! Matt. xxv, 41.

2. *The sinner's punishment is irremediable.* "Then a great ransom cannot deliver thee." To *ransom* is to deliver, either by *price* or by *power;* thus Christ redeems his people by the merit of his death, and the agency of his Spirit, 1 Pet. i, 18, 19; 2 Cor. iii, 17. The present life is the only day of salvation—there can be no redemption from the "vengeance of eternal fire,"—it is not a state of *probation*, but of *punishment*, Eccles. ix, 10. There is no *Redeemer* for the finally lost, and therefore there can be *no deliverance*—their destinies are irrecoverably fixed—they have nothing to offer for their ransom, nor can any possible *price purchase*, or *power rescue* them from *interminable* perdition. What, then, is our present state? Let us receive timely warning, and escape the death that never dies:—"Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are they that put their trust in him."

ETA.

VIII.—*A description of the Wicked, and the Hell into which they shall be turned.*

PSALM IX, 17.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

THE authorized topics afforded to God's ministers, for instruction and reproof, are various and dissimilar. Revelation presents innumerable subjects to our view; all of which, though not of equal importance, are worthy of the deepest attention and the most implicit confidence; some of these are the themes of every gospel minister, and the delight of every Christian congregation—the love of God to the world—the atonement of Christ for sinners—the invitations of the gospel to the most un-

worthy—and the heaven prepared for the saints, are truths of the most pleasing aspect, and the most encouraging character. Happy should we be in beholding all who sit under our ministry, charmed, converted, and drawn to God by the publication of these truths; but, alas! many are yet hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. These we must persuade by the terrors of the Lord, or "save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." Many are yet wicked; these must be told of the punishment which they are preparing for themselves—this is their "portion of meat" which must be administered "in due season,"—and this is the only apology we make for laying before you the awful affirmation chosen for the text; "The wicked shall be turned into hell," &c. Here observe,

I. THE CHARACTERS SPECIFIED;—"The wicked, and all the nations that forget God." Scripture is its own interpreter; and in describing the characters spoken of in the text, we will be guided by this rule, and compare spiritual things with spiritual. By the wicked, then, we understand,

1. *All those who wilfully violate the plain and positive precepts of God.* Such as intemperate persons, who eat or drink to excess, Nah. i, 10; Joel i, 5; Luke xii, 34; Rom. xiii, 13; Eph. v, 18. Profane persons, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness, Exod. xx, 7; Matt. v, 34; James v, 12. Liars, Zech. viii, 16; Colos. iii, 9; Rev. xxii, 15. Profaners of the Sabbath, who prostitute that holy day in purposes of pleasure or business, Exod. xx, 8; Isa. lvi, 2, and lviii, 13. Dishonest persons, who deprive their neighbours of their property, by acts of theft or extortion; taking advantage of their ignorance or necessity, to enhance the price of their goods, Exod. xx, 17; Matt. x, 19; 1 Thess. iv, 6.

2. *Among the wicked we must include all the persecutors of the people of God.* Such was Pharaoh, who said, "The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked;"—such was Manasseh, who shed innocent blood very much, and "who wrought much wickedness," 2 Kings xxi, 6;—such was Haman, who meditated a plan for the destruction of all the Jews from India even unto Ethiopia, and who is designated as "this wicked Haman;"—and such were the Jews in the days of our Saviour, whom he denominated a "wicked generation," and concerning whom Peter said, "Ye have taken, and by wicked hands," &c, Acts ii, 23.

3. *In the list of wicked persons we also rank all hypocrites, and impostors in religion;* who profess to know God, but by

works deny him. Such were the Pharisees, who came to our Lord, Matt. xxii, 15; but Jesus "perceived their wickedness," &c; for though they made clean "the outside of the cup and platter, their inward part was full of ravening and wickedness," Luke xi, 39.

4. *All must be denominated wicked who are unregenerate.* Wickedness is not a superficial defect, but a profound radical principle, deeply rooted in the heart of man, which is said to be "desperately wicked:"—the crimes we have enumerated are a few only, of the fatal fruits produced by this root of bitterness. Man, considered as a fallen creature, is not merely inclined to wickedness, but his inward part is very wickedness: and this applies not only to a few individuals, but to all; for "the world lieth in wickedness:" and unless your hearts have been washed from wickedness, in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, you must be included in the characters specified in the text. But, in addition to the wicked, we have "all nations that forget God."—Perhaps this expression refers to heathen nations, whose gods were idols, Psa. xcvi, 5; but how far the whole inhabitants of any nation forget God we cannot determine. Nations are composed of individuals, and every man who forgets God (whatever be his country, clime, or language) must be included here. The latter part of the text may be considered as explanatory of the former—the wicked are they who forget God. David's description of a wicked man is, "God is not in all his thoughts," Psa. x, 4;—he forgets God in the character of a *Sovereign*, and refuses to walk in his law, Psa. xii, 4;—as a *Benefactor*, he renders not again according to the benefit done unto him, 2 Chron. xxxii, 25;—he forgets *the all-prevailing presence of God*, so as to have no consciousness that God seeth;—he forgets *the word of God*—to its precepts he never conforms—with its invitations he never complies—its promises he never embraces—and its threatenings he never fears. Having described the characters specified in the text, let us consider,

II. THE AFFIRMATION MADE CONCERNING THEM;—"They shall be turned into hell." Here we may remark three things—the *place* into which they shall be turned—the *manner* how it will be done—and the *certainty* of the affirmation. The place is *hell*, שאול a word used sometimes to describe the grave, or a separate state of departed spirits, Gen. xxxvii, 35; Psa. xvi, 10; but more commonly descriptive of that place of punishment into which the souls of the wicked shall be thrust, when dis-

charged from the body, Luke xvi, 23. The Holy Scripture, which must be our sole guide in all things that relate to the eternal world, gives us various ideas concerning this awful state of being.

1. *It describes the place of punishment.* It is called "outer darkness," Matt. viii, 12;—a lake of fire, burning with brimstone, Rev. xix, 20, xx, 10;—a bottomless pit, Rev. ix, 1, 2, xx, 1, 2;—blackness, Jude 13;—the mist of darkness, 2 Pet. ii, 17, xx, 1, 2;—a furnace of fire, Matt. xiii, 42.

2. *The nature of the punishment.* It will be inflicted by fire—fire unquenchable, Matt. iii, 12; Luke iii, 17. The pain produced by fire, is the most intolerable that the body can sustain; even when it only touches a part of our flesh, how exquisite is the torment we feel; what then must the punishment of the damned be, who will be cast into a lake of fire? But there will be in hell, deep mental anguish; "there the worm dieth not," Mark ix, 43. This metaphor is used to describe the inward agonies, which the soul must sustain from the stings of conscience. Something of this kind is intimated by Homer, who, in describing the sufferings of Tityus in hell, says,

> 'Two rav'nous vultures, furious for their food
> Scream o'er the fiend, and riot in his blood,
> Incessant gore the liver in his breast,
> Th' immortal liver grows, and gives the immortal feast.'
>
> *Odyss.* b. xi, 709.

The Roman poets, like the Grecian, describe furies as avengers of wickedness in hell. They represent these furies, as old, squalid, meagre, and pale; they clothe their bodies with black garments; affix to their heads vipers instead of hair, and arm their hands with scorpions, whips, and torches, &c. In hell, the wicked will also be punished by the just judgment of God. Who can read such texts as the following, without being struck with horror at the view of their punishment? Deut. xxxii, 23—41; Psalms xi, 6; Jer. xxiii, 19; 2 Thess. i, 7—9; Rev. xiv, 9—11.

3. *The exquisite sense of punishment which the wicked will feel.*—"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God; and you yourselves thrust out," Luke xiii, 28; Matt. xiii, 42, xxii, 13, and xxiv, 51. Weeping and wailing, in the view of that eternal loss which they had sustained, for they shall see Abraham, &c, in the kingdom of God;—and from a consciousness that they might have shared in the same

blessedness;—and "gnashing of teeth," with undescribed agony and inward vexation, for having plunged themselves into that place of torment; with envy at the saints, and every expression of rage and malice against God and goodness.

4. *The companions of their punishment.* Besides the fearful and unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, liars, thieves, drunkards, and revilers, 1 Cor. vi, 10; Rev. xxi, 8, of which the wicked will be composed; they will be associated with "the devil and his angels," Matt. xxv, 41. The devil, who is described as an old serpent—an adversary—a dragon—and a roaring lion;—"his angels," his messengers:—these will be the tormentors of the wicked, Matt. xviii, 34. Their tempters here, will be their tormentors in hell; they will probably remind them of their folly—of their crimes—and of the heaven they have lost, and 'toss their infamy from tongue to tongue.'

5. *The perpetuity of their punishment.* The fire of hell is unquenchable, and the worm is deathless. The punishment is everlasting; the great gulf that intervenes between paradise and perdition, is impassable; and the crimes of the wicked, after death are unpardonable, Matt. xii, 32, xxv, 42; 2 Thess. i, 9; Rev. xiv, 11.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell;"—this shall be done,

1. *Unexpectedly.* A few indeed have presentiments of their approaching punishment, and forebodings of their impending doom; but the great mass of the wicked are lulled to sleep by the fascinating charms of sin, and the dreadful delusions of the devil;—are led on blindly towards destruction; and, contrary to all their expectations, are turned into hell.

2. *Suddenly.* How many are cut off in a moment! Death suddenly seizes upon them, and they go down *quick* into hell, Psa. lv, 23. And though many of the wicked may linger on to old age, yet the stroke of death is sudden, Psa. lxxiii, 19; Prov. xxix, 1; 1 Thess. v, 3.

3. *Irresistibly.* The expression in the text conveys an idea of violence and impetuosity; *turned*, or hurried headlong into hell; driven by death into the territories of perdition. The destruction of the wicked will come upon them as a whirlwind, Prov. i, 27. They will be bound hand and foot, and taken away and *cast* into outer darkness, Matt. xxii, 13.

The certainty of the affirmation in the text, may be inferred,

1. *From the general consent of mankind.* The idea of future punishment has been almost universal, from the remotest periods

of antiquity; and it cannot be supposed that men of different ages, and distant countries, would agree on this point, if the idea had not rested on grounds of wide extent, discernible to the understandings of men in general.

2. *From the justice of the moral Governor of the universe.* In the present state of things, evil goes unpunished in a thousand instances, either by human or divine justice; but the Judge of all the earth will do right, and will not suffer the eternal laws of right and wrong to be violated with impunity; and as the wicked are not punished here, the righteousness of God will induce him to turn them into hell.

3. *From the moral unfitness of the wicked for any other situation.* They must die, and heaven or hell must receive them; but they are totally unfit for the former, and completely prepared for the latter. Heaven is the region of holiness, and the habitation of the great King; but into his presence they cannot come, for evil shall not dwell with him; they cannot even *see* God; to hell they *must* go, this is the reward of their hands, the meed of their toil, and the wages of their iniquity.

4. *The certainty of the affirmation is incontestibly proved from the Bible.* Psa. lxxv, 8; Matt. xxv, 41. We conclude by observing—How awful is the state of the wicked! Language fails to describe the horror and punishment that await them; and what is most to be deplored, they have no knowledge of their danger. Oh how amazing is the infatuation that has seized them! —But what deep commiseration should Christians feel in contemplating the circumstances of their wicked neighbours, and especially the awful state of heathen nations! Oh what efforts should they make to save souls from death!—and what praise should they offer to God, who has plucked them as brands from the burning, and saved them from those things of which they are now ashamed.

BETA.

IX.—*The Object, Nature, and Effect of Prayer.*

PSALM xviii, 3.

"I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies."

THIS Psalm was composed by David, to commemorate his deliverance from the hands of Saul. Few men have ever known more of the variegated scenes of human life than David. His youth was spent in comparative obscurity, he kept his father's sheep, &c; but his personal prowess in attacking and killing Goliath of Gath, brought him into great repute, so that his praises were sung by the women in the streets: this excited the jealousy and envy of Saul, who cast a javelin at him, and more than once attempted his life. David fled from his presence, and sought to hide himself amidst the recesses of a forest. Saul with three thousand men, pursued after him; and so nearly did they approach each other, that when Saul in the heat of the day, retired into a cave to repose himself, David privily cut off a part of his robe, and might with equal ease have deprived him of life; having retired a little distance, he called to Saul, and expostulated with him on the impropriety and absurdity of his conduct; see 1 Sam. xxiv, 10—15. This so wrought upon his feelings, that "he lifted up his voice, and wept;" and "Saul went home, but David and his men gat them up into the hold." For this deliverance, and subsequent interpositions of Providence in his favour, David expresses his gratitude to God and begins the Psalm thus:—"I will love thee, O Lord," &c. The text presents two things,

I. DAVID'S PURPOSE;—"I will call upon the Lord," &c.

II. DAVID'S CONFIDENCE;—"So shall I be saved from mine enemies."

In the purpose of David, we have—What he declares concerning the LORD—that he is "worthy to be praised," and what he asserts relative to himself—"I will call," &c. The LORD is worthy to be praised. Praise is commendation bestowed upon persons for their real or imaginary excellencies; and by considering why we praise men, we may be furnished with reasons why God is worthy to be praised.

1. *We praise men for the beauty of their persons.* What

commendations are bestowed upon men for the elegance of their figures—the symmetry of their parts—the gracefulness of their motions!—"In all Israel, there was none so much praised as Absalom, for his beauty," &c. But what are the personal accomplishments of mortals, when compared to the ineffable beauties of the eternal mind? Milton supposed Adam to have begun his morning hymn with—

> 'These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
> Almighty; thine this universal frame,
> Thus wond'rous fair, thyself how wond'rous then!'

2. *We praise men for the largeness of their minds.* The amazing powers, and the vast intellectual grasp of capacity, which some possess, excite our astonishment and commendation: thus was Daniel extolled when it was said, that he had light and understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods was found in him, Dan. v, 11. And for similar or superior wisdom, Solomon's fame was in all nations round about, 1 Kings iv, 31. But what are all the intellectual attainments of mortals compared with the infinite mind of God? "He that planteth the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?" Psa. xciv, 9, 10. The LORD is a God of knowledge, 1 Sam. ii, 3. He is the only wise God, Jude 25.

3. *We praise men for the benevolence of their hearts;* for their tender sympathetic feelings towards the objects of distress. The law of kindness all applaud. Paul praised the people of Melita for their kindness manifested to those who escaped from shipwreck, Acts xxviii, 2. Oh how much does God deserve our praise for his benevolence! "I will praise thy name for thy lovingkindness," Psa. cxxxviii, 2. This is *universal* in God, Psa. cxlv, 9.—*Absolute*, he is full of compassion, Psa. cxlv, 8.—*Wonderful*, it is marvellous kindness, Psa. xxxi, 21.—*Perpetual*, the goodness of God endureth continually, Psa. lii, 1.

4. *We praise men for the liberality of their actions.* But how much more reason have we to praise God for his munificence! He scatters his gifts with a most liberal hand, and showers his blessings upon the most unworthy, Psa. cxlv, 15, 16; Matt. v, 45.

> 'Free as air his bounty streams;
> On all his works his mercy's beams,
> Diffusive as the sun's arise.'

That we may conceive how worthy God is to be praised, let us consider him not only in his *absolute*, but *relative* character. Is

he a Friend? What earthly friend ever proved so kind—so true—and so constant to us? Is he a King? What monarch ever felt such a deep interest in the welfare of his subjects—or formed such equitable laws for their government—or advanced them to such dignity? Is he a Father? What parent ever yearned over his children with such bowels of compassion—or bore from them so many provocations—or used such means for their instruction—or provided for them such a portion? Man's excellency is derived, and not necessary to his existence, or inherent in his nature. God's attributes and perfections are essentially his own. Man's virtues are finite and limited, and frequently mixed with much imperfection and infirmity; but God is all goodness—He is worthy to be praised. Hence the highest orders of beings who circle his throne rejoicing—who know him most perfectly—who see the grandest displays of his glory—have the widest view of the operations of his hands—and the clearest discoveries of the wonders of his love, offer him the noblest praises; "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come," &c, Rev. iv, 8—11.

Secondly, In the purpose of David, we have what he asserts relative to himself, "I will call upon the LORD,"—that is, I will pray unto the LORD: see Psa. l, 15; Jonah i, 6; Rom. x, 12. This purpose was,

1. *Pious.* The love of prayer is one of the most genuine evidences of a pious disposition, and a devotional spirit. To mark the total degeneracy of Israel, the prophet complains, "There is none that calleth upon thy name," Isa. lxiv, 7; and in the latter days, God promises to turn to the people "a pure language, that they may *all* call upon the name of the LORD," &c, Zeph. iii, 9.

2. *Rational.* Prayer is a practice as consistent with sound reason, as with genuine piety. God is infinitely independent: we are dependant upon him for life, and breath, and all things: prayer is the expression of that dependance, and whatever aversion men may have to the exercise of prayer, there are few who will not allow the propriety of the practice.

3. *Scriptural.* It is what God commands and directs us to do—it is what good men have uniformly done in all ages. Some of the first acts of piety after the introduction of moral evil, were acts of prayer; "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," Gen. iv, 26. Christians were distinguished by their prayers;—Saul had authority to bind all who called on the name of the Lord, Acts ix, 14.

4. *Necessary.* Obstructions will come in the way. Many things may put us out of love with prayer, and induce us to abandon its practice;—dissipations of mind, cares of business, fatigues of body, temptations from the enemy, and barrenness of soul. Oh how necessary to say individually, "I *will* call upon the LORD!" I will find time to do it, I will seize opportunities for doing it, nothing shall hinder me from doing it. Every religious duty should be performed under the influence of a fixed inviolable purpose.

5. *Beneficial.* Incalculable good results from the practice of prayer. David was no stranger to the advantages of prayer. To say, "I *will* call upon the Lord," is in effect to say, I will follow hard after God, I will cleave to him with purpose of heart, I will claim the accomplishment of his promises, I will be happy, I will secure my salvation.

II. DAVID'S CONFIDENCE: "So shall I be saved from mine enemies." This supposes,

1. *That David had enemies.* We may understand by this expression, that the Psalmist had reference to Saul, and the thousands of his hosts, who had pursued him in the wilderness: his enemies were numerous, Psa. xxv, 9; more than the hairs of his head, Psa. lxix, 4; who are ready to rejoice over him, Psalms xxxv, 19. We have all our enemies;—*human enemies;* 'Man is to man the surest, sorest foe;' therefore the Redeemer said, "Beware of men."—*Diabolical enemies;* these have all the cunning of a serpent, and all the rage of a lion. Devils are our implacable, restless, powerful, and unrelenting foes.

2. *That David was in danger from his enemies.* His life and his soul were in danger, Psa. xl, 14. We are in danger from *men;* from their examples and solicitations—of being enticed to sin—bantered out of our religion—or affrighted from doing our duty.—From the *devil,* who can blind our minds, pervert our judgments, alienate our affections from the chief good, and make our last state worse than our first.

3. *That David had no expectation of saving himself.* Our enemies are more mighty—more sagacious—and more successful than we are. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD; He only can save us; however powerful our foes are, "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." He seeth all their designs, and can blast all their purposes.

4. *That none can perish who thus pray;*—"So *shall* I be saved from mine enemies." This may be inferred from the *character* of the Being to whom we pray. "I, even I, am the Lord,

and beside me there is no Saviour," Isa. xliii, 11. Is God our Saviour, and will he not save those who pray to him?—From his *conduct*. God has uniformly saved his praying people; "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back," Psa. lvi, 9; Exod. xvii, 11.—Especially from his *word*. Hear his promises; "He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee," &c. Deut. xxxiii, 27—29; "I will be an enemy unto thine enemies," Ex. xxiii, 22, &c; "When the enemy shall come in like a flood," &c, Isa. lix, 19.

Conclusion.

1. *God is worthy to be praised.* Do you praise him?—How? perhaps merely by saying, once a week, 'We praise thee, O God,' &c. Oh let your lives praise him! Some never praise God—but blaspheme his name, insult his majesty, and cavil with his conduct;

> "Snatch from his hand the balance or the rod,
> Re-judge his justice, be the God of God."

Others praise God occasionally, when he happens to please them: but when he chastens them, then they murmur. But angels, who know him best, are incessant in praising him. Oh let us emulate their example! and learn from them our duty.

2. *David was a man of prayer.* His language was, "I will call upon the LORD;" and his conduct was in unison with his language; what he said he did: "I give myself unto prayer." "I have cried day and night unto thee." Is this your practice? Do not say, I have no time. David had all the cares and anxieties of government resting upon him. Do not think your elevated rank in society will exonerate you from the practice of prayer. David was an inspired prophet, a great warrior, and a divinely appointed monarch; but,

3. *David's triumphs over his enemies were the triumphs of prayer.* Oh how defenceless is a prayerless man! Do you restrain prayer before God? Then your state is awfully alarming. Will God save you out of the hands of your enemies? No; "He will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." Oh "arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, and thou perish not."

BETA.

X.—*Christian Magnanimity.*

PSALM xxiii, 4.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

MAN that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." This is a truth supported by the observations and experience of every day, and to which the whole human race may without hesitancy subscribe; for every man's cup of life contains a very strong infusion of bitter ingredients. However widely the situations and conditions of men may vary, every man "is born to trouble, (more or less,) as the sparks fly upward." No one of human kind is so exalted as to surmount all the storms of life: nor are any so depressed as to escape their painful influence. Piety itself, with all its interesting and important advantages, cannot claim an exemption from these common consequences of the original transgression; for the children of God, whether occupying the palace, or tenanting the cottage, have testified "many are the afflictions of the righteous." But although religion does not exempt its possessor from the common ills of life, yet it furnishes ample sources of consolation, and inspires him with holy magnanimity of soul in the most dangerous and appalling scenes. When David was fleeing before Saul, who "hunted him as a partridge in the mountains," he asserted his relation to his God, by a very beautiful reference to his recent occupation; "The Lord is my shepherd:" and on this interesting relation he built his confidence. And though the finger of Providence seemed to point his way through Hareth's darksome valley, he courageously declared, "I will fear no evil." In this pleasing portion of Scripture, we have,

I. A DREARY JOURNEY ASSUMED.

II. THE COURAGE OF THE TRAVELLER SPECIFIED.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF HIS CONFIDENCE DESCRIBED.

I. THE DREARY JOURNEY ASSUMED, may for the purpose of edification be considered in various points of view.

1. In the strictly *literal* acceptation, we understand the pious Psalmist to be following the leadings of Divine Providence, as the Asiatic flocks follow their piping shepherds from one pasture to another: in his progress he approaches the dark valley

of Hareth, generally dreaded on account of its dreary aspect, its barren soil, and its dangerous tenantry, being the common resort of ferocious animals: and it appeared very probable, at least, that his path would lie through that exposed district. But confiding in the power and beneficence of his God, his soul is not appalled with the dreary scenes before him. Wherever the hand of Providence fixes the Christian's dwelling, however exposed and unpropitious the path may be which the all-wise Ruler of the universe marks out for his feet, he may with calm, unshaken fortitude, proceed; for "The Lord God is a sun, and shield," Psa. lxxxiv, 11.

2. But the assumption before us may be considered as capable of a *metaphorical* application, referring to the various afflictions, and painful exercises unto which the righteous are exposed. These trying dispensations vary very widely in their nature;—physical defects, Isa. xxxviii, 1–3;—domestic afflictions and bereavement, Luke ix, 38, 39; John xi, 33;—secular embarrassment, Job. i, 20, 21; Luke xvi, 20, 21;—Satanic malevolence, 1 Pet. v, 8;—and the low state of the church of God, Jer. ix, 1; Phil. iii, 18; constitute some of the prolific sources of sorrow which the followers of Christ experience; and may be strikingly represented by the figure of death, from their sameness of origin, and general tendency.

3. We may also apply this assumption to that solemn and unknown period, when we "shall go the way whence we shall not return." The Christian must die. Death implies the separation of soul and body; the dissolution of the most tender relative ties; a separation from all terrestrial good; the occupation of the cold dark grave; and an entrance on an interminable state of being. Yet to the Christian, all these appalling considerations are but as the "shadow of death;" the sting is blunted; the poison is extracted; and shortly the full blaze of celestial glory will expunge the remembrance of the chilling shade from the beatified soul, except so far as remembrance will tend to augment the fervency of adoration, 1 Cor. xv, 54—57.

II. THE COURAGE OF THE TRAVELLER SPECIFIED. Man by nature is the subject of fear; he has a natural repugnance to affliction, and every painful exercise, and a tormenting fear of death and its consequences. Religion alone changes the scene, removes this slavish fear, and inspires the soul with confidence, counteracting these lamentable effects of the fall. The good man in the exercise of a lively faith, courageously asserts, "I will fear no evil:"—

1. *By giving way to painful anticipations.* The anticipation of evil has very frequently been a prolific source of painful sensation to the injudicious and doubting follower of Christ; the trials of days, months, and years to come, have been associated with those of the present moment; and all the pressure of the sorrow of anticipation bears solely on human strength, for the Divine promises only refer to present real afflictions; "As thy *days*, so shall thy strength be;" and infinite wisdom reminds us, that "sufficient is the day for the evil thereof." Pious magnanimity in the judicious and lively exercise of faith, does not bring trouble from afar; does not "take (anxious distressing) thought for the morrow," remembering who hath said, "Fear not, worm Jacob, I am thy God."

2. *By impugning the wisdom of Jehovah in the dispensations of his providence.* Infallibility sits at the helm; directs the tempest; governs the storm; and says to the raging waves, and to the equally tumultuous and opposing passions of men, "Hitherto shall ye go, but no farther." Omnipotence executes the purposes of wisdom, and both harmoniously co-operate with love, goodness, mercy, and truth. Resting beneath this invulnerable panoply, pious confidence asserts, "I will fear no evil," Matt. x, 29, 30; Rom. viii, 28.

3. *By sinking into a state of inactive despondency in the time of severe trial.* Man is prone to doubt, and naturally inclines towards hopeless inactivity when severely exercised by affliction. But the prudent subject of Christian fortitude, attends with fervour to the exercises of devotion; the claims of humanity; the duties of zealous effort; and the general means of deliverance and support, Psa. xxxiv, 6; xl, 1—3; 2 Cor. xii, 7, 8.

4. *By indulging immoderate sorrow under affliction and bereavement.* Religion does not consist of stoical insensibility; it does not destroy the feelings of humanity, but controls and sanctifies them; hence genuine piety, while painfully alive to the common afflictions and privations incident to human nature, does not "sorrow without hope." While the tear of humanity steals down the cheek, the placid countenance of divine resignation is expressive of "not my will, but thine be done," Job i, 21; 2 Cor. xii, 9.

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS CONFIDENCE DESCRIBED. "Thou art with me," &c. This confidence was not founded in the presumption of self-dependance; nor in the boasted power or wisdom of man, Jer. xviii, 5.

1. *In the presence of his God.* The God of David is with his people, dwelling in their hearts by his Spirit, 2 Cor. vi, 16. With them, to counsel and direct them in the midst of the various intricacies of life, Psa. lxxiii, 24. With them, to console them in their afflictions, Exod. xxxiii, 14; and to preserve them in their exposures, Deut. xxxiii, 26, 27. With them, on their side, taking their part against all that would injure them, Psa. cviii, 6. How immoveably firm is the basis of this confidence!

2. *The sufficiency of Divine protection:*—"Thy rod." A rod has been considered a very significant emblem of power and authority. How expressive is the Psalmist's language! How invulnerable is the defence of the righteous! He has the whole authority and power of the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe for his protection; with such a defence he may very properly bid defiance to the united phalanx of earth and hell, Psa. ii, 1—5; lxii, 1—8; xcvii, 1—3; Isa. liv, 17.

3. *The amplitude of Divine support;*—"Thy staff," &c. As a rod has been considered an emblem of authority, so a staff has been adopted as a significant representation of support. The same power which furnishes ample security for the good man from all his enemies, he may confidently use as a support under the pressure of all his troubles, and painful exercises. And though his afflictions rise mountains high, they can never crush him while he hangs on the arm of God, Psa. lv, 22; Isa. xl, 28—31; 1 Pet. v, 7. This subject,

1. Excites to close self-examination.
2. Discovers the importance of strong faith.
3. Exhibits the evil and danger of unbelief; and
4 Furnishes consolation for the afflicted Christian.

OMICRON.

XI.—*A sure method of obtaining our Desires.*

PSALM XXXVII, 4.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

THE present life is our state both of infancy and of probation; hence it is not difficult to perceive, how all things must be involved in mystery. We are neither capable of knowing, nor intended to know, much of the works and designs of God; but, having sufficient intimation of his will and our duty, our business is to obey, and to wait the event. Indeed, our manifest ignorance in one department of things, may make us less uneasy under difficulties in another. Thus, if we are ignorant of the form and nature of those first elements of which material bodies are composed, and of the principles on which matter assumes its almost endless modifications; on which, for instance, a mere lump of clay, apparently destitute of every kind of life, is transformed, first into vegetable, and afterwards into animal substance, and forms part of a body which is the residence of an immortal spirit; and on which the same body deserted by a vital principle, moulders into dust, and becomes a mere lump of common clay again:—if, in this department of *nature*, we so clearly perceive our ignorance, we may be the less surprised to find in the department of *grace*, that "great is the mystery of godliness," or in that of *providence*, that the judgments of the Lord are "a great deep." To prevent discouragement on this subject, appears to be the design of this Psalm. "Fret not thyself," &c, ver. 1—6, &c. In our text we have,

I. THE PSALMIST'S ADVICE. "Delight thyself," &c. In this he evidently recommends to us to consider the Lord as our chief good, and our best friend; and the advice is,

1. *Delight in the favour, approbation, friendship of the Lord;* and may be understood to imply three things,—*prize*,—*seek*,—*keep*, his favour. 1. *To prize his favour and friendship.* Man, whether savage or civilized, rich or poor, feels that "two are better than one," and therefore seeks the aid of friendship; but if human friendship is desirable, it is on many accounts much more desirable to have the friendship of God. We at present

pass over all the obligations of gratitude, &c, that lie on us, and on the ground of self-interest alone, observe, that *God is an ever present friend.* You have an acquaintance, who bears with your infirmities, promotes your interests, corrects your faults, shares your joys and sorrows, and, in short, proves that he is your friend; but in your severest affliction, he may be far distant, and even a stranger to the anguish which wrings your heart. God is about your bed of languishment, and about your path, in retirement, in the family, in the world, ever present. *He is an able friend.* In distress our earthly friends may be present, and may so wish and endeavour to assist us, as to involve themselves in trouble, without being able to relieve our sufferings. In sickness, accident, embarrassment, temptation, God can deliver, for he is also—*a judicious friend.* Earthly friends are not always such, and therefore sometimes rather mar than mend what their kindness prompts them to undertake. *God is a constant friend.* Man is changeable, but God is constantly able to relieve, as wise to discover our wants, and disposed to love us with an everlasting love; for *He is an immortal friend.* Death makes no allowance for human friendships, therefore "put not your trust in princes," &c, Psa. cxlvi, 3, 4; Jer. xvii, 5. And hence the Psalmist's advice is good;—*prize* the favour of God, and, 2. *Seek his favour.* All men are not his favourites; he is indeed good to all, but he is, nevertheless, "angry with the wicked every day;" therefore seek ye the Lord. How?—Call upon him. When?—While he is near. And be consistent;—"Let the wicked man," &c, Isa. lv, 6, 7. And be so consistent, 3. *As to keep his favour;* the goodly pearl of great price should be preserved as well as obtained, Jude xx. In order to this,

2. *Delight thyself in the service of the Lord.* The various particulars of this service, prayer, watchfulness, thanksgiving, reading the Scriptures, visiting the sick, &c, are often explained. To promote your esteem and performance of this service, let it be remembered, that it is excellent in itself, and is therefore recommended to you, as, "honest," and of "good report."—Even the knave respects honesty, and would rather obtain the same gain, in what even *he* considers an honourable way. This service also brings an excellent reward: its wages at present are righteousness, peace, joy, &c; and hereafter the kingdom of heaven. That this service may be known and performed, it will be necessary that thou,

3. *Delight thyself in the doctrine of the Lord.* He gives us

instructions in his preached and written word, "Wherefore take heed how ye hear." "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read." "For blessed," &c, Psa. i, 1, 2. To such characters belong,

II. THE PSALMIST'S ENCOURAGEMENT;—"He shall give," &c. Many passages of Scripture are to be understood with considerable qualification. In this passage, David must be understood to speak of, 1. *Innocent desires;* what has been said of the character to whom the encouragement is given, forbids any other supposition. 2. *They must be spiritual desires*, relative to the soul's prosperity and comfort; not worldly desires, of this farm, or the other business, &c. Some particular thing of this kind may appear, to even a good man, very desirable, to enable him to bring up his family, to provide for the poor, to assist benevolent institutions, &c; yet God has not positively engaged to bestow it on him. 3. *Scriptural desires;* Such as the Bible authorizes. When we attend only to what we may suppose connected with our soul's happiness, our thoughts may sometimes rove beyond what Scripture warrants. Oppressed by pain, which confines him from the assembly of the pious, or vexed by ignorance, and obstinacy, and deceit, and injustice, and blasphemy, and Satanic temptation, the good man may sometimes say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove," Psa. lv, 6: yet still he must both tarry and patiently wait. 4. *Earnest desires;* the desires of thy heart. Oftentimes our prayers do not succeed, because we are not hearty in them. We *think* what we ought to *desire* and then *say* what we *think*, rather than *pray* what we *feel*. 5. *Expressed desires.* He shall give thee the משאלת לבך the requests, the petitions of thy heart; what thine heart asketh. Some people tell us they desire much of spiritual good, who do not, however, appear in every thing to make their requests known to God by prayer, Luke ii, 9, 10; Phil. iv, 6. Now with these qualifications, we may venture to say, "He SHALL give thee the desires of thine heart." Consistently with these remarks, the Christian's desire may refer to *life*, that he may pass through it in the best, safest, and most useful manner; or to *death*, that he may die well—may die the death of the righteous; or to *eternity*, that he may obtain "the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul." His desires respecting *life* and *death* shall be given him in GOD'S way: and as to his concern about eternity, when he asks for a share of the felicity of heaven, he may pray most positively, without hesitation or doubt. Do *you* pray for it? if not, begin without delay. *Wicked* desires lead to death; *worldly*

desires to disappointment; therefore "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," &c; "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matt. vi, 19—21.

ZETA.

XII.—*The happy Result of waiting patiently for the Lord.*

PSALM xl, 1—3.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up," &c.

BY the prophet Hosea, we hear God complaining, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." From this complaint it appears that *ignorance is destructive;* and numerous facts concur in attesting the same melancholy truth. Some through ignorance of their *state*, remain unconcerned about salvation; some, through ignorance of their *duty*, omit to use the means which are appointed and required by God for obtaining salvation; and others, through ignorance of their *privileges*, conclude there is no hope, and sink into inactive despair of salvation.

Our text is therefore of peculiar importance, as it is exactly calculated to prevent or remove that ignorance which is so fatal to the best interests of mankind. Here we behold a description of our state as sinners, and learn the *necessity* of salvation; a description of our duty, as subjects of a divine Redeemer, and learn the *way* of salvation; a description of our privileges, as gospel penitents, and learn the *attainableness* of salvation. "I waited patiently for the Lord," &c. These verses teach us,

I. OUR STATE AS SINNERS. This we learn from David's state as a sinner, which he describes by the simile of a man fallen into a deep sounding pit; with his feet stuck fast in the miry clay at the bottom of it. This striking figure teaches us that our state, as sinners, is a state of deep declension—of total defilement—of imminent danger—and of utter helplessness.

1. *It is a state of deep declension;* we are deeply fallen. *We are fallen* from the most desirable enjoyments. Man, as the creature of God, while he retained his original rectitude, was

the subject of holiness, peace, and hope; but having all sinned, and come short of the glory of God, we have lost our peace and hope, with our purity—we know not the way of peace, Rom. iii, 17, 18;—and we are without hope, while without Christ, Eph. ii, 12;—"the crown is fallen from our head; wo to us that we have sinned." *We are deeply fallen*, into a pit of noise or sounding, as the words may be rendered, a pit that sounds by reason of its great depth. We are deeply sunk in *depravity*, or evil propensities—for we are at enmity against God, our parent, benefactor, and redeemer, Rom. viii, 7. We are deeply sunk in *transgression;* for we have expressed the enmity of our hearts against God, by wilful rebellion against him in our lives, Dan. ix, 9, 10. We are deeply sunk in *condemnation;* for we are under the curse of God, Gal. iii, 10; and the sentence of eternal death, Ezek. xviii, 20. We are deeply sunk in *misery;* for the pit into which we have fallen is a horrible one. The darkness of ignorance—the pangs of remorse—and the agitations of guilty fear—all concur to produce the most dreadful horror, Psa. cxix, 120.

2. *It is a state of total defilement.* The miry clay of sin defiles *all the faculties of the sinner's mind;*—unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled, Tit. i, 15;—their understandings, wills, and affections are corrupted—and out of the evil treasure of their hearts, they bring forth evil things. Consequently sin defiles—*all the powers of the sinner's body.* These also are yielded as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, Rom. vi, 13; so that we are all as an unclean thing, Isa. lxiv, 6.

3. *It is a state of imminent danger.* While we remain in this horrible pit certain destruction awaits us. Destruction *awaits* us—for we have justly merited it by our sin, Rom. vi, 23—and it is justly threatened by a holy God, Prov. x, 20. And destruction is *certain* if we remain here, for the earnest of it is already given us, John iii, 36.

4. *It is a state of utter helplessness.* As, with respect to the perishing object here described, the pit into which he is sunk is so deep, that the top of it is far above his reach—the clay so confines his feet that he cannot climb—if help come to him it must be from above—and he cannot expect deliverance, unless he obtains it by earnest cries;—so it is with perishing sinners. Salvation is *above* the reach of human *efforts*, Psa. cxxx, 4, and cxlii, 2;—our help can come only from *heaven*, Psa. cxxi, 1, 2; and we cannot obtain deliverance unless we cry for it, Ezek.

xxxvi, 37. This we learn also from the words of our text. which teach us,

II. OUR DUTY AS THE SUBJECTS OF A DIVINE REDEEMER. This we learn from David's example, "I waited," &c. Like him,

1. *We must make "the Lord" the object of our pursuit;* for the salvation which we need consists in the enjoyment of God. Being exposed to destruction, we need his *delivering mercy*, Psa. xvi, 4.—Being defiled, we need his *purifying influence*, Psa. li, 10.—Being deeply fallen, we need his *restoring grace* to raise us, Psa. cxlii, 6, 7.—As it is from the Lord alone that salvation cometh, so like David,

2. *We must wait for the Lord.* This must be done,—By *penitent application* to him, like the prodigal, Luke xv, 18, 19. —By *earnest application;* we must cry to him, Jer. xxix, 13. —By *confident dependance*,—on the foundation laid by God, Isa. xxviii, 16,—and on the promises made by him, Heb. x, 19—22. Like David,

3. *We must wait patiently for the Lord.* Patient waiting implies,—Humble *consciousness* and *acknowledgment* of our *demerit*, Gen. xxxii, 10.—*Entire resignation* to God's method of operation on our minds; that he may dispense his saving benefits and comforts as he pleases, Psa. lxxviii, 40, 41.—*Unfainting perseverance* in seeking him, Luke xi, 9, and xviii, 1—7. According to these promises, the words of our text teach us,

III. OUR PRIVILEGES AS GOSPEL PENITENTS. These we learn from David's success, "He inclined unto me," &c. As gospel penitents expect,

1. *An interest in God's gracious regards.* He will incline unto you.—He will incline his *ear* to your cry, Prov. xv, 8; Psa. cxlv, 18, 19.—He will incline his *heart* to compassionate your misery, Psa. ciii, 8, 13.—He will incline his *hand* to save and help you, Matt. xiv, 30, 31; Isa. xli, 10.

2. *Expect the enjoyment of most desirable favours.* Even—complete *deliverance* from danger and pollution; "He will bring you," &c, Psa. xci, 14–16:—firm *establishment* on the rock, Christ, Psa. xvi, 8; 1 Pet. v, 10:—and sacred *consolation;* he will put the new song into your mouth; that which David sings, Psa. ciii, 2, 3;—and Isaiah predicts, Isa. xii, 1, 2.

3. *Expect a capacity for extensive usefulness.* "Many shall see it," &c.—When divine grace is enjoyed, it may and should be *seen*, Acts xi, 23; Isa. lx, 1.—When the grace of God is

seen in its effects and fruits, it leads those who behold it to glorify God, Matt. v, 16.

In applying this subject, recollect,

1. *The suitableness of gospel salvation to our natural state.* We are fallen, polluted, weak, and miserable; and by this salvation, we are raised, purified, strengthened, and comforted, 1 Cor. i, 30; Col. ii, 9, 10.

2. *The necessity of waiting for God*, in order that we may obtain his saving benefits. This he expressly requires of us, Psa. xxxvii, 34.

3. *The certain success of gospel penitents;* from God's declaration, Lam. iii, 26:—from his kindness to all such, Luke xi, 10; and from his perfections, Rom. x, 12; Psa. c, 5. "The Lord is good," &c.

ALPHA.

XIII.—*The Remembrance of God the Result of Mental Depression.*

PSALM xlii, 6,

"O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

IT is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty, who was the author of this Psalm, or at what period it was composed. The writer of it was unquestionably a man of sincere piety, and strong devotional feelings; but a man subject to severe inward conflicts, and deep depression of spirits.—He was surrounded by the ungodly, and exposed to their sarcastic sneers, ver. 3, 10.—He was deprived of the public ordinances of religion, to which he had been accustomed, ver. 4.—And he appeared to think that God had forgotten him, as he could not realize that conscious sense of the Divine presence, which he once enjoyed, ver. 9.—But amidst these complicated trials, which broke over him like wave upon wave, he still had a refuge in God; to him his soul sincerely turned, and for him he ardently panted, ver. 1.—In the text, the Psalmist may be considered as expressing his *devout confidence—mental depression—* and *pious remembrance of God.*

I. DEVOUT CONFIDENCE ;—"O my God."

1. *Mine by natural right.* Between God and man, the Creator and the creature, subsists an indissoluble relation. He is the potter, and we are the clay—he is the Father, and we are the children; for we are all his offspring. The human body is his workmanship, Job xviii, 8; Psa. cxix, 73, cxxxix, 13. And he is the Father of spirits, Zech. xii, 1; Heb. xii, 9.

2. *Mine by personal preference.* God has indisputable claims on our affections, and we are obligated to love him with all our hearts; yet the world is the great idol to which thousands are fondly wedded, and for whose service they appear to live; but in the mind of the Psalmist, God had the decided preference; his language was, "My soul thirsteth for God." &c, ver. 2.—"As the hart panteth after the water brooks," ver. 1. See also Psalm lxiii, 1—8, and lxxiii, 25.

3. *Mine by adopting love.* Man in his degenerated state is an alien to God, and an enemy in his mind by wicked works; and though the natural relation between God and him still exists, yet the spiritual union is extinct; and he is considered as a disinherited child, being no part of the spiritual family: but by adoption we are reinstated in the affections of our heavenly parent, and put among the children, Jer. iii, 19. Hence a good man can say, "O my God," by filial confidence, Rom. viii, 15; Gal. iv, 6.

4. *Mine by divine appropriation.* God is far from the wicked, and his face is against them that do evil; but he not only reveals himself to his people, but, by a mysterious and inexplicable transfer, invests them with himself. His eye guides them, Psa. xxxii, 8. His ears are open unto their cry, Psa. xxxiv, 15. His arm saves them, Psa. xliv, 3. His love redeems them, Isa. lxiii, 9. His power strengthens them, 1 Cor. xii, 9. Hence God is their portion, Psa. xvi, 5. And they are heirs of God, Rom. viii, 17.

5. *Mine by public avowal.* Though good men do not wish to make an ostentatious parade of their religion, yet they do not scruple to acknowledge that they have "chosen that good part." Thus the prophet declares, Isa. xliv, 5, "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob," &c. The text describes a state of

II. MENTAL DEPRESSION ;—"My soul is cast down within me." This is a phrase that needs no comment. Who does not know what it means? This depression may result,

1. *From bodily infirmities.* The body and soul are so mys-

teriously united, that when the former suffers by affliction, the latter, in a greater or less degree, participates in its effects. Nervous complaints which press upon the spirits and weigh down the mind, are certainly owing to some defect in the bodily system. The oppression and bitterness of soul of which Hezekiah complained, were the effects of his affliction, Isa. xxxviii, 14, 15.

2. *From backslidings of heart.*—How much mental depression do the people of God labour under in consequence of their manifold defects! Defects in their love, their zeal, and their diligence; defects in the performance of their personal or domestic duties. Where is the Christian that is perfectly satisfied with himself! "My soul is cast down within me," is often the language of mental backsliding; arising perhaps from worldly cares. Men of extensive avocations are frequently oppressed with anxious solicitude; the world obtrudes upon their attention, attracts their desires and affections, and chokes the growth of the good seed.

3. *From inward conflicts.* The people of God are engaged in an eventful warfare. The devil and his emissaries are their foes. The conflict is carried on in the soul: there the fiery darts of the enemy are directed; hence they are often in heaviness through manifold temptations, and their soul is cast down within them.

4. *From afflictive bereavements.*—God tears from our embraces a beloved partner, an affectionate child, or an inviolable friend; and oh! how deeply we feel! How our souls sink within us! and though we may not sorrow as those who have no hope, yet 'nature unreproved will drop a tear.'

5. *From the state of mankind.*—The reproach of the world often wounds our feelings; the Psalmist compares this to a sword in his bones, ver. 10; but the wickedness and misery of our fellow creatures awaken in the souls of the pious, pangs of the deepest sorrow, Psa. cxix, 53, 136, 158; Phil. iii, 18. The text is also descriptive of,

III. A PIOUS REMEMBRANCE OF GOD;—"Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan," &c. This means from the land of Judea, as Jordan was the principal river in that country.—"And of the Hermonites,"—the mountains of Hermon, which, according to Calmet, was the general name of a mountain which had several little hills belonging to it, and lay to the northern boundary of Judea. "From the hill Mizar," that is, the little hill; some have thought Sion is meant, which was little in comparison with Mount Hermon. The purpose

of the Psalmist, to remember God from these places, either means, I will direct my attention towards Jordan, &c, and remember thee; or else, Whether I roam on the banks of Jordan, or climb the mountains of Hermon, or worship in the temple at Sion, I will remember thee. The latter is the idea of the poet:

> 'Thy mercies, Lord, before my eyes
> Shall yet in sweet remembrance rise,
> Though now with mournful steps and slow
> O'er Jordan's lonely banks I go,
> And exiled from my much loved home,
> On distant Hermon pensive roam.' MERRICK.

The doctrine of the text, then is,

1. *Wherever we go, God should be in our recollection.*—"I will remember thee." Remember thy actual presence, Psalm cxxxix, 8, 9.—Remember thy continued agency, Acts xvii, 28.—Remember thee—what thou art in thyself—what thou art to thy people—what thou hast engaged to do for them. This is the language of *conscious obligation*,—I am deeply indebted to God, and "therefore I will remember thee," as my benefactor;—of *devout affection*—I love God, and my thoughts shall instinctively turn towards him;—and of *fixed purpose*—"I *will* remember thee."

2. *That the remembrance of God, is the most effectual antidote against mental depression;*—"My soul is cast down within me, *therefore* I will remember thee." For whatever cause may contribute to depress the minds of the saints, they may always find sources of comfort in God. In the recollection that the LORD reigneth—that his providential care is ever over them—that nothing can happen to them, but by his permission—that all things work together for their good—and that their present sufferings will ultimately turn to their advantage, 2 Cor. iv, 17; Heb. xii, 11. The text may serve to remind us, by way of inference,

First, That man is born to trouble—the best of men may be disquieted and depressed: 'without are fightings, and within are fears.'

Secondly, That pious people are accustomed to pour out their complaints to God. Where should the children of God go with their sorrows but to their heavenly Parent, who pitieth them as a father doth his children.

Thirdly, that men who have no interest in God, have no refuge in the hour of trouble; for vain is the help of man.

BETA.

XIV.—*Iniquity regarded in the Heart renders Prayer unsuccessful.*

PSALM lxvi, 18.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

MEN ought always to pray, and to pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. Prayer procures many blessings—it averts many evils. Prayer is the first duty of man; the first in order, and the first in importance: it is man's highest consolation, it brings him nearest to his God, and it becomes his only refuge in the hour of distress. But though prayer has been productive of incalculable good, yet the impediments that lie in the way have cramped the energies of some, and totally prevented others from engaging in its practice. With the impious in the days of Job, multitudes are ready to say, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" Oh how many vain oblations and profitless prayers are offered up to God! How few gain all the advantage by their prayers, which they are designed to procure! How many are no better for an exercise in which for years they have been accustomed to engage! Why is this? Has not God pledged his word to hear our prayer? Yes, but prayer, in order to find access to God, must possess a certain character, and spring from a certain disposition—for God heareth not sinners.—The prayer of a sinner, a wilful impenitent sinner, is an abomination to God; the love of sin paralizes our prayers, and completely counteracts their efficacy.—Such is the sentiment we are called upon in the text to consider; In doing which, we will notice two things,

I. A SUPPOSITION STATED;—"If I regard iniquity in my heart."

II. A CONSEQUENCE DEDUCED;—"The Lord will not hear *me*."

I. "If I regard iniquity," &c. Iniquity is another word for sin; this has its existence in the heart—the heart is its seat and centre—all the wickedness upon earth springs from the heart,

Mark vii, 21. But the supposition in the text, is not the existence of sin in the heart, but the regarding of it there—iniquity may exist where it is not regarded. We may delight in the law of God, and yet have another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind, Rom. vii, 22, 23. To *regard* iniquity in the heart, is to respect it—feel a secret attachment to it—indulge favourable thoughts concerning it—'treat it as a friend, bid it welcome, and make provision for it.' But as there is nothing more deceitful than the heart, and as deception on a subject so intimately connected with our welfare as the present, should be most sincerely deprecated; we will enquire, When may it be said that iniquity is regarded in the heart?

1. *When it is permitted to reign in the life.* Iniquity is most awfully prevalent among us; crimes of the most hateful character, and the most destructive tendency, abound through all the gradations of society, and in every village and hamlet in the land. Multitudes declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not, they feel no solicitude to conceal it; and iniquity must be regarded in the heart, where it is indulged in the life; where the *practice* is allowed, the *principle* which gives birth to it must be encouraged. No man can love the fruit, and yet hate the tree that bears it.

2. *When we offer apologies for its existence.* Iniquity may be hated in the heart, and yet occasionally appear in the life; a man may be overtaken in a fault, who is not habitually faulty. Through the prevalence of temptation, a Christian may be overcome of evil.—What then? Does he offer apologies for his crime? Does he seek to hide it? Does he palliate the evil? No, he says, 'I have sinned against the LORD: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' But alas! this is not the conduct of the hypocritical professor, who regards iniquity in his heart; like Achan he labours to conceal his sin; and like Gehazi, dissembles with his lips to deceive those who may question him as to his conduct. When concealment can be no longer practised, invention is employed to palliate the offence; then we hear such excuses as the following; 'That human nature is very weak—that we are all sinners—that no man is without his defects—that others are equally guilty—or that there was no harm in it,' &c.

3. *When we evince no solicitude for its destruction.* That God *can* effect the destruction of sin, and redeem the soul from all iniquity, is a truth which may be easily inferred from his Almighty power, and that he *will* do it, for all his believing peo-

ple, is abundantly proved by his promises, Ezek. xxxvi, 25; Psa. cxxx, 8;—and from the design and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, Titus ii, 14; 1 John i, 7, and iii, 8. And when we consider how hateful iniquity is in the sight of God—what mischief and misery it has introduced among mankind—what agonizing pain it cost the Saviour to make an atonement for it—and what a hell of insufferable punishment it has lighted up for the damned—we find the strongest reasons for desiring its destruction. But if we evince no concern to obtain the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God—if we neglect to apply to the throne of grace—never wrestle with God—never exercise faith in the blood of the covenant—nor come with confidence to Him who is able to save to the uttermost, we plainly show that we regard iniquity in the heart.

4. *When we make provision for its desires.* Sin is considered as a body, Rom. vi, 6; and as the human body seeks nourishment, in order to perpetuate its existence, so sin has its desires, lusts, and inclinations; and every man must be regarded either as ministering to the flesh, and feeding the carnal principle, or else opposing its claims and controlling its dominion. Pride, anger, malice, self-will, and every member of which the body of sin is composed, may be strengthened by indulgence; and we give evidence of regarding iniquity in the heart, when we fulfil the lusts of the flesh, and yield obedience to the tyranny of sin.

II. A CONSEQUENCE DEDUCED. "The LORD will not hear *me*;"—that is, will not answer my prayer: See ver. 19, 20. This supposes,

1. *That prayer may be offered to God, even when iniquity is regarded in the heart.* Sinners pray when they are in trouble;—Pharaoh confessed his sin, and said, "Intreat the Lord," &c, Exod. ix, 27, 28;—the Pharisee stood and prayed in the temple, but his language evinced the pride and haughtiness of his heart.

2. *That where iniquity is regarded in the heart the prayer is unacceptable to God.* "The LORD will not hear *me*." Why will he not? First, because there is no *sincerity* in such a prayer. Prayer to be acceptable, *must* be sincere;—we must sincerely desire the blessings we solicit, and sincerely wish to be delivered from the evils which we appear to deprecate in our prayers: but where iniquity is regarded, prayer is but the expression of hypocrisy;—the heart does not desire what the lips express. The Pharisees made long prayers, but they made them for a pretence; and will God hear such prayers? Secondly, There is

no *fervency* in such a prayer: prayer to be acceptable must be fervent, James v, 16. David cried night and day to God, and with his whole heart, Psa. lxxxviii, 1, and cxix, 45;—the blind man cried out so much the more, Luke xviii, 39;—Jesus was in an agony when he prayed, Luke xxii, 44;—and he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, Heb. v, 7. But where iniquity is regarded in the heart, there can be no ardency of desire after God—no hungering and thirsting after righteousness—no taking the kingdom of heaven by violence—no saying, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." Thirdly, There is no *faith* in such a prayer. "He that cometh to God *must* believe that he is," &c, Heb. xi, 6. Prayer is acceptable and prevalent, in proportion to the confidence of him who offers it; the promise is made only to the prayer of faith, Matt. xxi, 22; James i, 6, 7. But does the man who regards iniquity in his heart, possess this faith? Does he believe that God will hear his prayer? Has he a confidence in the promises of God? Does he say, "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief?"—Has he any realizing views of the willingness of God to save him? No; a presumptuous confidence he may have, but to that faith which is of the operation of God, he is a complete stranger.

3. *That the man whose prayer God will not hear, is in a most pitiable state.* This is implied in the text, and the truth of it will appear, when we consider, First, If God will not hear us, we can derive no *comfort* from our prayers.—Man in himself is a miserable creature—God possesses infinite happiness—prayer opens a communication between the soul and God, and the consolations of heaven are richly poured into the mind; but this privilege is denied to those who regard iniquity, &c. Secondly, We shall obtain no *succours* from our prayers. Man in himself is a helpless creature;—God is Almighty—and they who wait upon God in prayer renew their strength;—"In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Psa. cxxxviii, 3. But this blessing can never be realized by him who regards iniquity, &c. Thirdly, We shall obtain no *security* by our prayers. Man is a defenceless creature—dangers innumerable await him—enemies of the most malignant character seek to destroy him—hell threatens him—death, the king of terrors, is far in advance to meet him;—but the name of the LORD is a strong tower, and prayer places the believing soul in that impregnable fortress, where no evil can befall us. He who regards iniquity in his heart has no refuge:

God will not hear him. Where, then, can he turn? or to whom look? Fourthly, We shall receive *no heaven* in answer to our prayers. If God will not hear our prayers upon earth, he will not hear our praises in heaven. No; that iniquity which we regard will hinder our prayers, and if persisted in till it is full, will ruin our souls; "for indignation and wrath," &c, Rom. ii, 8, 9.

INFERENCES.

1. How utterly impossible it is to deceive God. "The eyes of God run," &c, 2 Chron. xvi, 9.—If you regard iniquity God knows it, his piercing eye looks through all disguises.

2. That there may be a fair show of religious profession, even where iniquity is regarded in the heart. All is not in reality what it seems to be. David supposed it possible for him to pray, even with the love of sin in the heart.

3. That the most effectual way to secure success in our prayers, is to hate iniquity and put away our sin, and beseech God to prove us, &c.

4. That if God has not answered our prayers, we should be solicitous to know the cause and find out the hinderance.

BETA.

XV.—*The Light and Defence of the Upright.*

PSALM lxxxiv, 11.

"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

THIS Psalm appears to have been composed when the author was, by some means, detained from public worship; and throughout, it breathes the most ardent desire after the means of grace; "How amiable," &c, 1—4, 10, 11. To show the propriety and rationality of these sentiments of the Psalmist, it is proposed to describe—the privileged characters—and their privileges.

I. THE CHARACTERS PRIVILEGED. "Them that *walk uprightly*." The metaphor of *walking* is often employed in Scripture to represent the *course of conduct* pursued; thus the wicked and the unthinking are said to "walk in *the way* of their heart"—*frowardly*—and *contrary* to God.—On the contrary, the righteous walk "*with* God—*before* him in the way of *his*

commandments—uprightly." The figure itself may be useful to denote *activity*, *progress*, and *consistency*. To walk *upright* is proper to man, in opposition to that *crooked* inclination condemned, Hosea xi, 7;—to the walk of a quadruped, on all fours: or to the crawling of a reptile. The God of order expects his creatures to act as *becomes* them; but we must have recourse to some *rule* to determine what *is* becoming, proper, and upright. The word "*uprightly*" comes from the same root, ישר and, in a moral sense, means the same as "*right*,"—is conformable to rule—in this case, to the rule of God's word. The Psalmist, perhaps, by "them that *walk uprightly*," here intended persons *habitually devoted to God*;—such as would say "He knoweth," &c, Job xxiii, 10; 2 Cor. i, 12;—but we venture to *extend* it to the *vilest*. Let us, however, *understand* the subject: uprightness means conformity to *rule*—to *God's* rule. Now, some of you have been *swearing*, *lying*, &c; God's word says to *you*, "*Cease* to do *evil*," &c; if, therefore, you *now* forsake your old course, and comply with this rule, according to your *present* opportunity, you *begin* to "walk uprightly," and become subjects of promise, Matt. vi, 22. We advance *another* step: some of you *have* turned from sin—to you the rule says, "Behold the Lamb," &c.—*press*, then, towards him, and claim the promises. Once more, Christ is *not* the minister of sin; nor are talents and graces given, but to be improved, Matthew v, 13—16; Titus ii, 11, 12;—and he that returns from his own ways, lays down his weapons of rebellion—sues for pardon through the Lord Jesus—and *goes onward*, "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord," *fully* answers to the character our text describes. Come then, my hearers, *shake yourselves* from the *dust*—live according to your *rank* and your *advantages*;—and enjoy,

II. THE PRIVILEGES OF THE UPRIGHT—in what God *is* to them, and *does*, and *will do* for them. He is,

First, a '*sun*.' Had David intended to represent God as he is in himself, he could not have selected an object fitter for his purpose; for so suitable is the appearance of the sun to the ideas men form of *glory* and *excellence*, that not a few have mistaken him for his Maker: this, however, he did *not* intend;—he knew it must be vain to attempt a description of pure being. A comprehension of the Infinite Eternal is beyond human capacity. We understand him, therefore, to speak of the Divine Being, in *relation* to his pious servants—and, *in reference to them*, he compares him to the material sun; as this is to us, and our world, a source of *light*—of *comfort*—and of *fruitfulness*.

1. Every one, though as ignorant of the *nature*, of light as a philosopher, and as unable to determine whether it is a part of the sun's body, transmitted to us, or only an effect of some inconceivable influence, by which he affects our atmosphere, well knows that the sun's *presence* makes *day*—his *absence*, *night*;—and therefore acknowledges him the source or occasion of light. He is, therefore, fit to represent the Deity—for as "God *is light*, and in him is no darkness," so he is "the *Father* of lights," both *intellectual* and *spiritual*,—*reason* is from him—he also shows us our *spiritual state*, &c. A man, long confined in complete darkness, though his figure and garb were the most disgusting—and though the walls and roof of his dungeon threatened to crush him to death—and an open door invited him to liberty and enjoyment—yet, while the darkness remained, would be a stranger to *himself*, his *danger*, and his privileges; but *light* assists him to *make the necessary discoveries*, and to *act* accordingly. So the sinner sees *himself*, his *danger*, and a *door of hope*; and escapes from tormenting *doubt* and *anxiety*, into the light and liberty of the sons of God; hence the Lord is a sun.

2. As a source of *comfort*. The sun is a *common* blessing, whose light and warmth we enjoy daily; and for which we are, therefore, peculiarly grateful. Were we, *for months* together, deprived of his beams, how should we relish them? Eccles. xi, 7;—*more sweet* the rays of "the Sun of righteousness," &c.

3. The sun also comforts us as a source of *fruitfulness*, to the vegetable part of creation; filling our barns with *blessings*, our hearts with *gladness*. When the vivifying influence of divine grace is felt, the "fruits of righteousness" are produced; and we rejoice to find it so. We ought here also to remark, that, as "the orb of day" enables us to *transact business*, and to find our way; so the righteous may expect sufficient *providential* direction, Psa. xcvii, 11. The glory of the Lord shall rest on his tabernacle; and upon all the glory there shall be a defence; for the Lord God is,

Secondly, '*a shield*.' The shield was a piece of *defensive armour*, which would be useless, and which therefore would not be mentioned,—if there were no *enemies*;—if our enemies were not *active*;—if their arrows could not *reach us*.

The good man has enemies, 1 Pet. v, 7; Eph. vi, 16;—God *does* protect him, and he will give—1. "Grace," *favour*, Gen. xxiii, 15; and the *effects* of favour, Heb. iv, 16;—he will forgive iniquity, &c, Exod. xxxiv, 6; Titus iii, 7;—and *assist* as well

as pardon, Isa. xli, 10;—will give *preventing* grace, to deliver from our native ignorance and inability—*sanctifying* grace—*comforting* grace, Col. iii, 16; 2 Thess. ii, 16, 17;—and even *restoring* grace; "I will heal your backslidings," &c. Now where the soul-renewing effects of divine grace are felt and manifested, there is, 2. "Glory," already begun: whether by that word we understand *manifested excellence*, or that *respect* which is paid to excellence manifested. In the esteem of wise men—of angels—of God—the righteous *is* even now more excellent than his neighbours, Prov. xii, 26; and this is only a *preparation* for *future* glory, Phil. iii, 21. 3. "*No good thing*," &c,—not no "*pleasant*," but no "*good*" thing. Whatever is good in its nature, or in its effects, whether it be pleasing or *painful*, enjoyment or *privation*, indulgence or *correction*, he will not withhold.

INFER,

1. *No* good thing belongs to the obstinately wicked;—his very *pleasures* are cursed, &c, Prov. i, 32; Isa. xxviii, 1, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 18. Whence,

2. The *way of duty* is the only way of constant safety and blessing, Heb. x, 38.

3. We know only *in part*—God's thoughts and ways are high above ours, as the "heavens are high above the earth." Therefore,

4. When under bereavements and correction, we should walk by faith, and wait the result, Rom. viii, 28; 1 Pet. i, 13: 2 Thess. i, 8—10.

ZETA.

XVI.—*Sinners admonished.*

PROV. i, 23.

"Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make my words known unto you."

VARIOUS are the means which the Lord employs to convince the wicked of the error of their ways, and bring them to a knowledge of Divine truth. He has not only sent his Son, to seek and to save that which was lost, but he also waits to be gracious; and is "longsuffering, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance." He, therefore, invites the most abandoned to participate the blessings of his salvation, and encourages them to believe, by the most powerful persuasions and captivating motives;—he mercifully pities the folly, and justly complains of the incorrigible obstinacy of the impenitent;—he frequently visits them with the tokens of his displeasure, and faithfully warns them of the danger to which they are exposed;—but as he is "good to all," he suspends the execution of his wrath, and gives them *space* to repent and believe the gospel;—and as he hath no pleasure in the destruction of sinners, he kindly admonishes them to escape the ruin of sin, and graciously promises the richest blessing to the truly penitent. Such is evidently the import of his affectionate address to mankind, in the language of the text, "Turn you at my reproof," &c. These words also describe the Lord's dealings with his sinful creatures in reference to—*the reproofs he administers—the submission he requires—and the encouragement he imparts.*

I. THE REPROOFS HE ADMINISTERS;—"Turn you at *my reproof.*" We are surrounded with faithful admonishers, who are all *arranged* and *employed* by God, to win the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. He reproves us,

1. *By the Scriptures.* His word contains the most *pointed* and *salutary* admonitions;—it records the appropriate cautions and solemn warnings of Moses and the prophets—of Jesus Christ and his apostles, Rom. xv, 4; 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17.—It also repeatedly sends us for instruction and reproof to the works of creation—to admonitory examples of impiety—and the awful solemnities of death and the grave, Isaiah i, 2, 3; Prov. vi, 6; Matt. xi, 20—24; Deut. xxxii, 29; Eccl. ix, 10;—we are faithfully reproved in every part of the sacred writings. Let us hear and live.

2. *By ministers.* They are sent to warn the wicked of their danger, and show them the way of salvation.—They zealously persuade men by the terrors of the Lord, and encourage them by the promises of the Gospel;—as "ambassadors for Christ," they pray you, in his stead, to be reconciled to God. You have often heard their reproofs—witnessed their labours—and beheld their tears. But have you taken warning? Have you believed their report? Have you realized the truth of their message? Acts xxvi, 18; Col. i, 28.

3. *By conscience.* This is an *internal* and *universal* monitor—it is always with us, and cannot be silenced—it is a *witness* to all our proceedings, and irresistibly *arraigns* and *condemns*

the guilty culprit, Rom. ii, 15. It speaks with *sovereign authority*, and its awful criminations fill the trembling sinner with inexpressible *anguish* and *bitterness* of soul, Prov. xviii, 14. Has it not often accused you of crimes, alarmed your fears, and warned you of approaching danger? Does it not frequently testify of your sinful state, and assure you that except you repent you must perish?

4. *By providence.* There is a perfect *harmony* between the purposes of God, and the arrangement of his works. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." The Lord often reproves us by pious parents—family connections—and godly neighbours. He also admonishes us, by afflictions and difficulties, to teach us the frailty of nature—the folly of sin—and the vanity of the world. The continual dissolution of our fellow-mortals, speaks loudly to survivors, and says to all, "prepare to meet your God—be ye also ready," &c. The *gracious design* of the Divine reprover will appear by considering,

II. THE SUBMISSION HE REQUIRES. "*Turn you* at my reproof." Through sin we have all forsaken the Lord, and "gone astray like lost sheep;" but he kindly *reproves* our folly, and *invites* us to return unto him,

1. *With penitent hearts.* We cannot come to him on the ground of *innocence* or personal worthiness; and as *guilty sinners* we ought to approach him "with broken and contrite hearts;" which are sacrifices highly becoming the creature, and always acceptable to the Creator, Psa. li, 17.—Genuine repentance includes—conviction of sin—humiliation of soul—compunction of spirit—holy indignation and shame—and humble confession to God, Luke xv, 17—19; 1 John i, 8, 9. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted."

2. *With believing minds.* Jesus Christ is the *only way* to the Father, and the *medium* of all spiritual blessings;—through him, therefore, we must return to God, *believing* in his name, and *trusting* in his merits;—it is by faith we credit the gospel—embrace the Saviour—and realize salvation, John iii, 18; Acts xvi, 31. "He that believeth shall be saved;" for Christ is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

3. *With fervent devotion.* The Lord must be sought by earnest prayer, as the object of adoration and the source of blessedness;—though he knows our necessities, yet he will be inquired of for the communication of his blessings. We should call

upon him sincerely—humbly—confidently—fervently—and diligently.—Prayer eminently distinguishes the character of every returning penitent, and God will assuredly hear and answer their requests, Luke xviii, 13; Acts ix, 11; Matt. vii, 7, 8.

4. *With prompt obedience.* The service of God, and the paths of sin, are *incompatible*, and can never be reconciled, Matt. vi, 24;—we must, therefore, cease to do evil, and learn to do well.—Religion requires a *universal* renunciation of the *principles* and *habits* of vice, and an entire devotedness to God, both of heart and life, Isa. lv, 6, 7; Titus ii, 12; Luke i, 74, 75. We should be induced thus to turn to God by,

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT HE IMPARTS. "Behold I will pour out my Spirit," &c. This promise is highly important and comprehensive. The participation of the Holy Ghost is an inestimable privilege which includes every *holy principle* that he implants, and every *gracious disposition* which he inspires. The Spirit of God is,

1. *A convincing Spirit.* Under *this* character he is poured out upon all mankind, John xvi, 8—11. It is his special province to open the eyes of our understanding, that we may understand the Scriptures;—by him the Lord makes "known his *words* unto us;"—he imparts a spiritual *discernment*, that we may discover our real state and character, and comprehend "the truth as it is in Jesus," 1 Cor. ii, 10—12.

2. *A quickening Spirit.* He removes the death of sin, and infuses the life of grace;—he graciously dwells in his people, and by his *vital influence* they are born again, and become new creatures;—he witnesses their adoption, and fills them with "the fruits of righteousness," Rom. viii, 15, 16; Gal. v, 22, 23. It is the Spirit *quickeneth* and *giveth life* and peace to the soul, Eph. ii, 1.

3. *A comforting Spirit.* All real consolation is *divine* in its author, and *spiritual* in its nature;—it is the immediate *production* and fruit of the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv, 17;—he communicates ample support and comfort in every time of need;—he is, therefore, repeatedly styled "the Comforter." Through his sacred energy, we receive joy and peace in believing; and "rejoice evermore—pray without ceasing—and in every thing give thanks."

4. *A sanctifying Spirit.*—He is justly denominated the "Spirit of holiness;"—all his operations are *hallowing*, and productive of Christian *purity*;—he transforms the soul into the image and glory of God, Titus iii, 5; 2 Cor. iii, 18.—His baptismal fire

consumes sin, and *purifies* the sinner, Matt. iii, 11, 12;—he sanctifies his people *wholly*, and preserves them *blameless*, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. v, 23. Let us therefore now consider our ways, and turn unto the Lord, that we may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which he has promised to them that repent and call upon his name, Luke xi, 13.

ETA.

XVII.—*The Evil of Ignorance.*

PROVERBS xix, 2.

"Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good."

THIS book is very significantly termed THE PROVERBS. Solomon was its author, who was not only a king, and reigned over a great people, but who was wiser than all men, and whose fame was in all the nations round about; he spake also three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. The method of teaching by proverbs may be traced back to a very early date.—The ancient sages of Greece highly esteemed this kind of exercise, and strove to excel in the wisdom and sententiousness of their proverbs; but long before Solon, or Chilo, or Pittacus, existed in Greece, the Hebrews had their proverbs, 1 Sam. xxiv, 13; Deut. xxviii, 37. Long discourses often create fatigue and excite disgust—men have not always leisure to attend to them, nor penetration to comprehend their meaning; but proverbs neither burden the memory nor puzzle the understanding;—they are, therefore, adapted to all persons, and may be exemplified in all situations. Had Solomon's proverbs been mere emanations of that "largeness of heart" with which he was endowed, they would have been highly worthy of our attention; but they possess the sanctity of Divine oracles, and the infallibility of inspired records, and therefore have indisputable claims to our regard, and imperative demands on our obedience. Let us, therefore, turn our thoughts to the text.—We have here,

I. A CASE SUPPOSED;—A soul without knowledge.

II. AN AFFIRMATION MADE CONCERNING IT;—"It is not good."

I. THE CASE SUPPOSED is a soul without knowledge. This is not to be understood absolutely; if knowledge is considered as conscious perception of our own existence, or the existence of objects around us, it is scarcely possible for the soul to be without knowledge, except in the case of infants or idiots;—in the former the senses are not sufficiently matured to become inlets to knowledge; and in the latter, owing to some mysterious defect in the organization of the material system, they are incapable of performing their accustomed work. The soul may be furnished with a species of knowledge, which is rather a curse than a blessing.—All knowledge is not benefit, nor all ignorance misfortune.—Knowledge is to be valued, not by the multiplicity but the excellence of the objects it embraces, and the permanency of the benefits it confers. The knowledge specified in the text may imply,

1. *A knowledge of the works of God in creation.* In this Solomon peculiarly excelled;—"He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall," &c, 1 Kings iv, 33.—Nor was David less disposed to contemplate the wonders of God in creation; "When I consider thy heavens," &c, Psa. viii, 3.—God is known by his works;—their vast magnitude serves to display his power—their amazing extent shadows forth his immensity—the admirable harmony that prevails among them, evidences his wisdom—and the ample provision made for all creatures, exhibits his goodness. It is not good for the soul to be destitute of this kind of knowledge;—"Because they regard not the works of the LORD," Psa. xxviii, 5.

2. *A knowledge of our particular calling, trade, or profession.* Mankind form one great family, which, like the various members in the human body, should combine their efforts for the good of the whole. In this family there are men of different ranks, arts, and professions;—some who make our clothes, others who build our houses, others who cultivate our lands, &c. To mechanics, artisans, and husbandmen, we are indebted for the conveniences and comforts of life;—'The king himself is served by the field:'—and, as we all share the benefits of society, we should all hold ourselves responsible to promote its welfare. No man is obliged to know every thing, but every man ought to know what he professes to know, and what he in effect tells the world he does know.

3. *A knowledge of the will of God.* If this world were the only sphere of human action, man would be obligated to know

nothing but what refers to the present life;—but when we consider the brevity and uncertainty of *this* mode of exercise, and the eternity of *that* state to which we are constantly tending, our principal efforts should be directed to the attainment of that knowledge, which will prepare us for the enjoyment of God in heaven. The will of God is revealed in the Bible. This revelation is so *plain*, that he may run that readeth it;—so *ample*, as to embrace the whole of our duty;—so *repeated*, that we have precept upon precept, &c;—so *circumstantial*, as to mark every description of character, and identify every variety of situation;—so *impartial*, as to know no distinction between the monarch and the beggar;—and so *full* and *perfect*, that "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him all the plagues that are written in this book. Our knowledge, therefore, of the will of God should be *Scriptural*;—we should never think ourselves wise above what is written, but refer all our ideas to the infallible test of revelation.—*Spiritual*, not merely as it refers to the spiritual or intellectual part of man, but as it is communicated by the agency of the Eternal Spirit, 1 Cor. ii, 12—14; 1 John ii, 20.—*Experimental*;—does the Bible exhibit privileges? These we should realize.—Does it offer benefits? these we should embrace.—Does it display models? These we should emulate.—*Practical*;—"If ye know these things," &c, John xiii, 17.—The abuse of knowledge involves us in deeper condemnation than even total ignorance, Luke xii, 47. The inspired writers scarcely allowed that to be called knowledge which produced no practical effect;—"He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar," 1 John ii, 3, 4.

II. AN AFFIRMATION MADE CONCERNING IT;—"It is not good."

1. *It is not good, as it does not harmonize with the original purpose of God in the formation of man.* The soul in its pristine innocency, was endowed with extensive treasures of knowledge, and a vast intellectual capacity for improvement in science: See Col. iii, 10. Adam gave names to all cattle, &c, Gen. ii, 19. These names expressed some prominent feature in their characters; hence he must have possessed an intuitive knowledge of their natures; but with the extent of his knowledge in reference to God and his works we have no acquaintance; and as God saw it was not good for the soul to be without knowledge, when his Almighty fiat gave it birth, we may infer the truth of the affirmation in the text. For a thing cannot be morally good at one period of time, which is not good at another.

2. *It is not good, as it is not commendable.* What can be more disgraceful than ignorance, especially ignorance of God, our duty and our interest. To be possessed of a soul, an immortal intelligent substance, formed for the attainment and placed within the sphere of knowledge, and yet to continue in ignorance! Read the commendations which Solomon bestowed upon wisdom, in Prov. viii, 11, 18, 19. "A man shall be commended," &c, Prov. xii, 8. "Some have not the knowledge of God," &c, 1 Cor. xv, 34.

3. *It is not good, as it is not beneficial.* Nothing can be deservedly denominated good, which is not advantageous to its possessor. A soul without knowledge is devoid of good; and like a wild and desolate wilderness, where the hand of cultivation has never broken the stubborn soil, noxious weeds, or useless shrubs, grow in rank luxuriance; while a soul enriched with spiritual knowledge, resembles a highly cultivated field, adorned with vernal beauty, or crowned with golden harvests. There cannot be a more useless member of society than an ignorant man. For whom does he live? For God?—Alas! he is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him. For men?—He knows not the duties he owes to society, and therefore cannot practise them.

4. *It is not good, as it is not comfortable.* Ignorance is the negation of all moral excellence, and to suppose that this can produce comfort, is not less absurd, than to expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; it may produce a sensitive delight, which is the highest happiness of a brute, or even afford a mischievous pleasure, which is the gratification of a fiend, but this is the only comfort of which it can boast. But a man possessed of an experimental knowledge of God, has springs of consolation to which ignorant persons are complete strangers.

5. *It is not good, as it is not safe.*—"My people are gone into captivity, because they have not knowledge," Isa. v, 13. "Fools die for want of wisdom," Prov. x, 21. "My people are destroyed," &c, Hos. iv, 6. Ignorance is so far from being the mother of devotion, that it is the mother of destruction. It may, like darkness, conceal the danger, but it does not prepare to meet it; it may bind the bandage before the eyes, but it will not remove the snare that is laid for the feet.—Those who will be punished with everlasting destruction, &c, 2 Thess. i, 9, are they who know not God, &c. "This is the condemnation," &c, John iii, 19. An ignorant man is prepared for every evil work; there is no vice which he hesitates to commit; it is a sport to

him to do mischief, Prov. x, 23. "Fools make a mock at sin," Prov. xiv, 9. Therefore Solomon said, "Let a bear robbed of her whelps, meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly," Prov. xvii, 12.

From this subject let us learn,

1. *What gratitude is due to God, who hath afforded us such facilities for the acquisition of knowledge.* What an age we live in! What a country we inhabit! Who made us to differ from heathens and savages? Not ourselves, but He who hath made of one blood all nations of men, &c, Acts xvii, 26.

2. *How diligently we should use the means with which God hath favoured us, for augmenting our stock of knowledge.* "Brethren, be not children in understanding," &c, 1 Cor. xiv, 20. The more enlarged our understandings, the nearer we approximate to the exalted state of superior beings, who know even as also they are known. Let us search the Scriptures, and pray for wise and understanding hearts. Let us frequent the ministry of those who run to and fro, that knowledge may be increased. Let us associate with wise men, Prov. xiii, 20. And let us apply our hearts to wisdom.

3. *Let us commiserate the circumstances of those, who are destitute of the means of information.* There are millions of men in different parts of the world, who have no books—no preachers of righteousness—no Christian sabbaths—no religious ordinances—and even in some of those countries usually termed Christendom, how scanty are the means of knowledge! Errors of the most pernicious kinds are not only permitted to prevail, but transformed into imaginary virtues. Oh! let us do all we can to send Bibles and missionaries to the destitute nations of the earth.

4. *Seeing that all knowledge, in its most improved state in this world, is comparatively immature and imperfect, with what delight should we anticipate the period when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face.* Here impediments obstruct the path of knowledge—prejudices impose upon our senses, and false lights delude our minds. Heaven is the region of knowledge; 'there knowledge grows without decay, and love shall never die.' May we all reach that everlasting habitation of light, glory, and perfection, through Jesus Christ.

BETA

XVIII.—*The Conduct and Punishment of Incorrigible Sinners.*

PROVERBS XXIX, 1.

"He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

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1. "BECAUSE sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." So it was in the days of Solomon; and in our own day, also, too many instances occur in which this lamentable assertion is still exemplified. The God of this world blinds the minds of them which believe not; and under the influence of this infatuation, they acquire and employ the fatal art of extracting poison from the most promising means of health. Thus we find the grace of God turned into lasciviousness; Christian liberty used as an occasion to the flesh, or a cloak of maliciousness; and the forbearance of God abused, by a most ungrateful perversion of its design. The longsuffering of God leadeth to repentance; but through human folly and depravity, what is designed to promote repentance, is made the occasion of preventing it: because grace abounds men continue in sin, and hereby multitudes render their damnation both just and certain.

2. To prevent or cure an evil pregnant with such dreadful consequences, is a most important labour of benevolence; and every antidote that can be successfully resorted to, is justly entitled to our regard. Hence, our text has strong claims on the attention of mankind, as it indicates God's good will towards the human race—and as it implies the last effort of heaven to save perishing immortals, by alarming their fears, when every measure of a more gentle description has proved unsuccessful. "He that being often reproved," &c. In these words we find —The conduct of an incorrigible sinner described;—and the punishment of an incorrigible sinner threatened.

I. THE CONDUCT OF AN INCORRIGIBLE SINNER DESCRIBED.

He is one, "that being often reproved hardeneth his neck."

1. *He is often reproved.* Reproof is a charge of something culpable, personally addressed to the offender. Consequently,

reproof supposes some *faults* or *crimes* in the sinner's conduct, on which the charge is founded. These crimes in general, are rebellion against God; ingratitude towards him; and careless inconsideration, Isa. i, 2, 3. The reproof of sinners is administered by *God;* he sets our sins in order before us, Psa. l, 21; —he warns us of our danger in consequence of sin, Luke xiii, 6—9; Rom. ii, 8, 9;—and he instructs us how to avoid ruin;—Ezek. xviii, 30. God reproves sinners *variously*. He reproves them *immediately*, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, John xvi, 8;—and *mediately*, by various instruments. As by the rebukes of providence; Mic. vi, 9; by admonitory dreams, Job xxxiii, 14—17; by the contents of his written word, 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17;—by the ministry of his accredited servants, Col i, 28; —and by the remonstrances of our own consciences, 1 John iii, 20, 21.

God reproves sinners *frequently;* they are *often* reproved. Thus our Lord reproved the sinners of his day, Matt. xxiii, 37. And thus he reproves sinners still; for the means by which he administers reproof being so various, sinners must of course be often reproved; while God's longsuffering waits on them, not a year, nor a month, nor a week, nor a day, nor a waking hour of their lives, can pass away without witnessing a repetition of his reproofs, Rev. iii, 20. God reproves sinners for *gracious purposes*. This is undeniable; for reproof is given—partly to chasten them for their sins, Lam. iii, 39; Mic. vii, 9,—partly to reform them from their sins, Lam. iii, 40, 41; Isa. xxvii, 8, 9;—and partly to bring them to himself, that they may obtain the blessings of salvation, Rev, iii, 17—19; 2 Pet. iii, 9. But though God wills the salvation of sinners, yet his gracious design is often frustrated by their obstinacy, Isa. i, 5. Our text therefore in describing the incorrigible sinner, represents him as one who being often reproved, yet remains unreformed, because,

2. *He hardeneth his neck*. This is a metaphor taken from a stubborn unmanageable bullock or ox, that cannot by any means be brought to do its master's work, nor even willingly to bear the yoke. A good explanation of this figure we find in the words of the prophet, "But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear; but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction," Jer. xvii, 23. Thus the sinner that will not be reclaimed, hardeneth his neck, by refusing to *do*, or even to *learn*, the will of God concerning him. He hardeneth his neck by various means. For instance, he hardeneth it by *wilful*

inattention to God's word, Jer. liv, 15; John iii, 19, 20; by *careless delays*, Acts xxiv, 25; by *inordinate worldly-mindedness*, Matt. xxii, 5;—by *obstinate disobedience*, Exod. v, 2; Jer. vi, 16; by *scornful contempt of God*, Psa. cvii, 10, 11. He continues to love simplicity, and hate knowledge, till he is brought to delight himself in scorning, Prov. i, 22. Sinners harden their necks also, by *infidel and atheistical principles*, Psa. xciv, 7, and liii, 1. And by provoking God to *withdraw his gracious influence* from their minds. Compare Rom. i, 28, with 2 Thess. ii, 11, 12. The talent when not improved is taken away; and the misemployment of it is punished with inflicted torment, Matt. xxv, 28, 30. So also we find in our text,

II. THE PUNISHMENT OF INCORRIGIBLE SINNERS THREATENED;—"He shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

1. *He shall suddenly be destroyed.* The destruction here threatened certainly does not imply *annihilation*, or the discontinuance of existence. For when the sinner's body dies, his *soul* dies not with it, but returns to God as his judge, Eccles. xii, 7. It is driven away in its wickedness, Job xviii, 18; Prov. xiv, 32. It is turned into hell, Psa. ix, 17. And it remains in a state of conscious torment, till the general resurrection, Luke xvi, 23, 24. Nor shall his *body* be annihilated, for it shall rise to the resurrection of damnation, John v, 28, 29. And his soul and body when reunited shall be subject to eternal punishment, Matt. xxv, 46.—He shall be *destroyed;* for all his desirable *possessions* must perish with this world, 1 John i, 2, 17; 2 Pet. iii, 10. His *happiness* must perish; and be succeeded by endless misery, Rev. xiv, 10, 12. His *honour* must perish; and be succeeded by eternal infamy, Prov. iii, 35. His *hope* must perish; and be succeeded by eternal despair, Prov. xi, 7.—He *shall* be destroyed. This is certain from the decree of God, as our Sovereign, Prov. x, 29;—and from his perfections as our judge, Job ix, 4; 2 Thess. i, 7, 9.—He shall *suddenly* be destroyed. This implies that his destruction is near, James v, 9;—and that it shall come on him when not expected by him, 1 Thess. v, 3; Job xxxvi, 18. Hence,

2. *He shall be destroyed without remedy.* This is certain; for the only Saviour of sinners is Jesus Christ, John iii, 14—16; Acts iv, 12. But incorrigible sinners reject Christ, John v, 40; 2 Pet. ii, 1. Consequently, their destruction becomes unavoidable, for the salvation of their souls is neglected, Heb. ii, 3. The only season for obtaining the blessings of salvation, is sinned

away by them, Eccl. xi, 9. And their state, as fixed at death and judgment, must remain unalterable, Rev. xxii, 11.

APPLICATION.

This alarming subject teaches us,

1. That *the season of God's longsuffering is limited.* It will certainly end with death: and it may possibly end before death; either by the commencement of the general judgment, or the departure of God's Holy Spirit from us, Gen. vi, 3; Jer. vi, 8. "This I say brethren, the time is short."

'Think of the sands run down to waste;
We possess none of all the past,—
None but the present is our own:
Grace is not put within your power,
'Tis but one short, one shining hour,
Bright and declining like the setting sun.
See! the white moment wing'd with haste,
The *now* that flies may be the last;
Seize the salvation ere 'tis past,
Nor mourn the blessing gone.'

WATTS.

2. That *those who defer repentance, through presumption, deceive their own souls.* Presume not *on being admitted into heaven without obedience;* for you must bear God's yoke here, or be destroyed, Isa. i, 20; Luke xix, 27. Presume not *on a more easy conversion at some future season,* for delay hardens the neck of sinners, and renders their salvation more difficult. By despising God's counsel, the bonds of sin are strengthened, Isa. xxviii, 22. Presume not *on a future day to repent in,* for the destruction of sinners is sudden, Prov. xxvii, 1; Matt. xxiv, 44. Presume not *on universal restoration after death and judgment;* for the destruction of hardened sinners admits of no remedy, Heb. x, 26, 27; Mark ix, 44. Our subject teaches us,

3. That *the reproofs of God should be regarded as expressions of his mercy.* So they are represented by himself, Heb. xii, 5, 6. And as such, they should be improved by us, Hos. vi, 1.

4. That *seasonable subjection to God's authority will be attended with certain salvation.* Of this we are strongly assured, by the declaration of God, 2 Cor. vi, 2. "Behold, now," &c. And by the promise of God, Isa. lv, 6, 7. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found," &c.

ALPHA.

XIX.—*The Tranquillity, Security, and Supplies, afforded to the Gospel Church.*

ISAIAH XXXIII, 20, 21.

"Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby."

IT is the general opinion, that the prophecies contained in this chapter, had a distinct reference to the period when Sennacherib invaded Judea, and besieged Jerusalem. Sennacherib was king of Assyria, and having heard that Hezekiah king of Judah had shaken off the yoke of Assyria, to which he was in part tributary, he came against him with a vast army, and took all the strong cities of Judah; but the Lord had mercy upon Israel, and sent a destroying angel against the army of Sennacherib, who slew in one night in the camp of the Assyrians, "a hundred fourscore and five thousand men," 2 Kings xix, 35. Sennacherib returned with shame and confusion to his own country; and fearing, as historians relate, that his god was angry with him, he determined to sacrifice his sons to appease the wrathful deity; but *they* having heard of his intention, came upon him while he was paying his adorations to his god *Nisroch*, and slew him with their swords, and fled into the land of Armenia. Hence Isaiah begins this chapter with, "Wo to thee that spoilest," &c; "when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled," &c. Warriors and heroes, however celebrated their characters, or mighty their achievements upon earth, are, in the eyes of God, the spoilers and robbers of mankind. But notwithstanding the fright and terror into which Israel should be thrown by the anticipation of an invading army, the prophet here promises, "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation," &c. Many of the prophecies have a twofold accomplishment, and whatever reference the text might have had to Jerusalem literally, it must be understood spiritually as illustrative of the privileges conferred on the church of God under the New Testament dispensation. The text establishes three things:—

I. THE PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD;—"Jerusalem shall be a quiet habitation."

II. ITS PERMANENCY AND SECURITY;—"a tabernacle that shall not be taken down," &c.

III. THE NATURE OF THE SUPPLIES AFFORDED TO IT;—"The glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams," &c.

I. THE PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY OF THE CHURCH:—"Jerusalem shall be a quiet habitation." Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judea, was a city on which the highest encomiums were bestowed; but that it was designed to typify the gospel church, is sufficiently proved by Gal. iv, 26. There were four things which might have contributed to render Jerusalem a quiet habitation, all of which apply with equal propriety to the gospel church.

1. *The character of its governor.* We can easily conceive how much the tranquillity of a place depends on the wisdom, justice, and peaceful disposition of him who governs it. Christ is the governor of his church, Isa. ix, 6, 7; Matt. ii, 6; Col. i, 18. His wisdom is unsearchable, Col, ii, 3. His justice is immutable, Jer. xxiii, 5, 6. And he is the Prince of peace, Isa. ix, 6. The Author of peace, 1 Cor. xiv, 3. The Lord of peace, 2 Thess. iii, 16. And as Jerusalem was considered as the peculiar residence of the Deity, Psa. lxxvi, 2, cxxxii, 14; so Christ dwells in his church, Col. i, 27, iii, 17.

2. *The peaceable tempers of its inhabitants.* Men who are haughty, violent, and litigious, often light up the flames of discord, and create civil commotions among their tranquil neighbours. But Jerusalem shall be a quiet habitation; the members of the gospel church are all peaceable in their dispositions, however turbulent they were naturally; grace has tranquillized them, and 'laid the rough paths of peevish nature even.' They have peace with God, and the peace of God is in their hearts, Rom. v, 1; Phil. iv, 7; and it rules and governs their hearts, Col. iii, 15. Hence they follow peace with all men, Hebrews xii, 14; and follow after the things which make for peace, Rom. xiv, 19.

3. *The security of its fortifications.* Jerusalem was renowned for this; nature and art combined to render it a place of safety, Psa. lxviii, 12, 13; cxxv, 1. The gospel church is impregnable. Zion has been ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem literally become heaps; but the gates of hell shall never prevail against the church of Christ, Matt. xvi, 18.

4. *The subjugation or destruction of its enemies.* The church of God has always had its enemies. The powers of darkness are the insidious and implacable foes of the people of God, but these he will bruise under their feet, Rom. xvi, 20. The church has also had its human enemies, but these the Almighty has either subdued or destroyed; conquered their enmity by his grace, or confounded their devices by his justice. Look at Sennacherib and his hosts, and see the fearful end of many a persecutor, Isa. lx, 12.

II. ITS PERMANENCY AND SECURITY;—"A tabernacle that shall not be taken down." Here the prophet employs another figure in describing the church.—This is not the only place where the word "tabernacle," is used to represent the gospel church: compare Amos ix, 11, with Acts xv, 16. There were two tabernacles in the wilderness;—the tabernacle of the congregation where the people assembled for the despatch of their secular affairs; and the tabernacle of the LORD: here the Israelites offered sacrifices, performed religious service, &c, see Exod. xxv. This tabernable was,

1. *Of heavenly origin.* God planned the whole design, and deigned to adjust the most minute parts, and enjoined it upon Moses to make all things according to the original pattern, Exod. xxv, 9. So in the gospel church all is divine. The individuals of which the church of God is composed, are purchased with his own blood, Acts xx, 28. The change wrought in them is attributed to God, John iii, 5. Hence they are called God's workmanship, Eph. ii, 10. The pattern they imitate is the Son of God, 1 Pet. ii, 21. The object at which they aim is the glory of God, 1 Cor. x, 31.

2. *Its artificers were divinely inspired.* God filled men with his Spirit in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, for accomplishing the work of the tabernacle, Exod. xxxi, 2—6. So in the gospel church, God chooses his own instruments, and qualifies them by his own Spirit; see 1 Cor. xii, 10—28.

3. *It exhibited tokens of the divine glory.* Here God met with his people, and communed with them from above the mercy seat, Exod. xxv, 22, xxxiii, 9, xl, 34. Thus in the gospel church, God displays the glory of his grace, and power, and mercy, in the salvation of sinners, and this glory we behold with open face, 1 Cor, iii, 18. And here God meets with his devout worshippers, Matt. xviii, 20. But the tabernacle in the wilderness was a moveable pavilion, and was frequently taken down, and carried by the Levites from place to place, Numb. i, 51.

In the promised land it rested in Gilgal, afterwards in Shiloh, &c. But the gospel church is "a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." May not these stakes and cords, which were used to give stability to the tabernacle, very fitly represent the ordinances of God, through which we receive grace to help in time of need, and the promises of the gospel which give security to the believing soul? the former shall never be removed, nor shall the latter ever be broken. The throne of grace remains accessible—the gospel continues to be preached—houses for worship multiply on every side—ordinances are still frequented—not one of the stakes is removed, nor ever shall be removed. Nor is any cord broken; the promises of grace are as immutable as their Author, who is without variableness or shadow of turning.

III. THE NATURE OF THE SUPPLIES AFFORDED TO US. "The glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams," &c. The prophet might have designed to contrast Jerusalem literally, which was ill supplied with water, and through which an inconsiderable stream was accustomed to flow, with the abundant supplies afforded to the gospel church—"a place of broad rivers and streams."

1. *Our supplies are divine.* "The glorious LORD will be to us," &c. Jehovah is the glorious LORD—all is glorious that essentially belongs to him.—He has a glorious name, 1 Chron. xxix, 3; Psa. lxxii, 19;—a glorious high throne, Jer. xvii, 12;—a glorious arm, Isa. lxiii, 12;—his habitation is glorious, Isa. lxiii, 15;—his holiness glorious, Exod. xv, 11;—his power glorious, Col. i, 11;—and his appearing will be glorious, Tit. ii, 13. Our supplies are all from God;—he furnishes us with our daily bread, Acts xiv, 17;—he redresses our spiritual necessities, all our springs are in him;—he is our portion, he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies;—and he is our shield and exceeding great reward, Psa. lxxxvii, 7; Lam. iii, 24; Psalm xxiii, 5; Gen. xv, 2.

2. *Our supplies are abundant.* We shall not be supplied from a broken cistern, nor a stagnant pool, nor a mountain torrent, nor even a single river, but from "broad rivers and streams;" or, as Lowth renders it, "confluent streams of broad waters." Can any thing in nature be more descriptive of abundance? and yet even this falls infinitely short of displaying all that the glorious Lord is to his church. Oh, why should we complain of our leanness, when we may be abundantly satisfied with the fat-

ness of God's house? Why content ourselves with a few drops of consolation, when we can have access to broad rivers and streams of pleasure?

3. *Our supplies are inexhaustible.* A rill may dry up, and a current cease to flow, but broad rivers and streams hold on their majestic course. God's communications to his people are perpetual. Worldly joys decline—creature comforts fail—sensual pleasures vanish;—but God remaineth;—his treasures can never be diminished—he is a fountain that will for ever flow, and a sun that will for ever shine.

4. *Our supplies are ever near.* '*There*,' (in the church,) 'the glorious LORD will be.' When Moses smote the rock in the wilderness, the waters gushed out and ran in dry places like a river; and the ancient Jews were of an opinion that these waters followed the Israelites in all their journeyings. However doubtful this may seem, yet our supplies are always at hand; we need not ascend up into heaven, nor descend into the deep, nor take the wings of the morning, to find God, or meet with these broad rivers, &c. No, God is ever with his people, and ever accessible by them, Exod. xx, 24.

5. *Our supplies are unmolested.* There "shall be no galley with oars," &c. On these broad rivers and streams, no warlike ship shall sail, to invade the city, or cut off supplies from the inhabitants. This may serve to remind us that in the gospel church, they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, &c, Micah iv, 4.

The doctrine of the text should,

1. *Induce gratitude.* To us this prophecy is graciously accomplished; we live to see Jerusalem a quiet habitation; the fury of the persecutor never annoys us. We have heard of Bastiles, Inquisitions, and Smithfield fires, and bloody persecuting Bonners;—we have heard of those who were stoned, sawn asunder, and slain with the edge of the sword; who, instead of having quiet habitations, wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth; but the storm has blown over, and the tempest has subsided. Hallelujah!

2. *Inspire confidence.* The church is secure, it is a "tabernacle that shall not be taken down." Men have strove to take it down, and have said "Rase it, rase it;"—the kings of the earth have set themselves, and the rulers have taken counsel together against it, but not one of the stakes is yet removed, nor one of the cords broken. God will not take it down, and men cannot.

3. *Excite expectation.* God "will be to us a place of broad rivers," &c. "I will extend peace to her like a river," &c, Isa. lxvi, 12. Oh, what privileges are we called to realize!—What rich delights and exalted enjoyments lie before us!—Even in this world, God can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; but chiefly let us anticipate the period when we shall live in the new Jerusalem, where we shall be led to fountains of living waters, and where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

BETA.

XX.—*The Messiah's Commission.*

ISAIAH xlix, 6.

"And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

WHEN we consider on the one hand the acknowledged and manifest ignorance of man on subjects beyond the reach of his senses, and on the other, the goodness of the Divine Being, who has evidently intended and provided for human happiness, it would seem, *a priori*, not unreasonable to hope, with Socrates, that the Deity would vouchsafe us an explicit revelation, which should acquaint us with our duty in the present life, and our destiny beyond it. Considering our feebleness of intellect, and our scantiness of capacity, it would also appear natural to expect that such a revelation, if given, would contain a reference to some subjects relative to the nature and government of God, which must be to us mysterious and incomprehensible. And seeing that this revelation would not only relate to man's final destination, when time shall be swallowed up in eternity, but also to different periods of time, and to successive generations of men; and that in many instances, the agency of man would be employed to bring about events revealed long before the season of their actually taking place; (which agency must nevertheless be left free and unconstrained;) of course, during the lapse of ages, the great objects of such revelation would be more

clearly unfolded, and its light shine "more and more unto the perfect day."

These conclusions of reason are verified by facts. A revelation has been given, which contains mysteries and predictions; some of those predictions were, at first, comparatively obscure; but "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth;" insomuch, that to compare the prophecies of the Old Testament with their fulfilment as recorded in the New, affords the pious and intelligent Christian at once a pleasing exercise of his understanding, and a confirmation of his faith.

The writer from whom we have read our text, on account of the clearness with which he foretold "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," has been, by way of eminence, styled, 'The evangelical prophet.' The chapter in which the text is found, is understood to refer to gospel days; and the meaning of this text in particular, seems to be fixed by good old Simeon, who, when Jesus was presented to the Lord, hailed him as God's "light," and his "salvation," Luke ii, 28—32. We regard this passage, therefore, as an epitome of the scheme of redemption; and recognise in it God's gift to man, and his intention in that gift.

I. GOD'S GIFT TO MANKIND;—"I will give thee," &c. Here it may be observed, that as this gift is bestowed for *moral purposes*, the subject is calculated to lead our thoughts to the Giver, as our *supreme Lord*, and *moral Governor*. It shows in him an *infinite condescension* to interest himself about us; for however important we may be to ourselves, or in our own estimation, with him "the nations are as a drop of a bucket," &c, Isaiah xl, 15. He receives the worship of perhaps unnumbered worlds; and by a single act of his will, can bring into being millions of intelligences to enjoy his life, to feel his love, and hymn his praise. Yet he *does* stoop to mankind; and in so doing evinces a disposition of mind, so to speak, for which human language wants a name—a mixture of displeasure at their sin, Prov. xv, 9, 26; 1 John iii, 8;—pity of their folly, Deut. xxxii, 29; Luke xix, 41, 42;—commiseration of their sorrows, Eph. ii, 4;—concern for their welfare;—love of their persons;—and benevolence the most holy, and extraordinary, and disinterested, John iii, 16. This is manifested in *his gift*, "I will give thee," &c. Two things here invite our notice, 1. The person given, and, 2. The office or undertaking to which he is appointed.

1. *The person given.* On this subject did we need direction, St. Matthew would direct our application of the passage; "Behold my servant whom I have chosen," &c, Matt. xii, 15—18. And from him, and others of the sacred writers, we learn the *dignity* of this person: the second person in the incomprehensible Godhead; related to the Father, as his living, active Word, John i, 1;—his *fellow*, Zech. xiii, 7; Matt. xxvi, 31;—with whom he is one, John xiv, 10, 11; 1 John v, 7. Hence it follows that this is a *great*, an *incomparable* gift. We are utterly unqualified to comprehend the nature of the divine relations; and can only form some poor and inadequate conceptions from earthly analogies. When our Redeemer is styled "The *Son* of God," the title assists us to form something like a conception of divine complacency, by means of the love and tenderness of (human) parental affection. He is God's "*only-begotten* Son;" this seems to denote oneness of *nature*;—"His *dear*," his "*well-beloved* Son;" this denotes their oneness of *design* and *operation*. And the apostle could think of no greater encouragement to hope for every thing good, than God's sparing not *his own Son*, Rom. viii, 32. Yet this, great as it is, is a *free* gift;—not *conceded* to the powerful, but granted to the *impotent*, the *needy*, the *perishing*; not *conferred* on the *deserving*, as a reward of merit, but bestowed on the *rebellious*;—not *yielded* to *importunity*, but *given* to "the evil and unthankful," *unasked* and *undesired*. We must remark also,

2. The Saviour's appointment, office, or undertaking;—"That thou shouldest be my *servant*." This office of *servant*, may be one of honour, but is always one of *subordination*. One passage of Scripture will sufficiently explain this part of our subject; and, at once, assert the Redeemer's divinity, and show us how *voluntary*, how *humiliating*, and how *painful*, was his servitude;—"Who being in the form of God," &c, "*made himself* of no reputation, and *took upon him* the form of a servant," &c, "and became obedient, even to the (*shameful*, *painful*, *accursed*) death of the cross," Phil. ii, 6—8.

II. God's intention respecting mankind. This is,

1. "To *raise up* the tribes of Jacob," which *are fallen* from their *religious honours and pre-eminence*, and from *national independence*, into *dispersion*, and *disgrace*, and *contempt*, Deut. xxviii, 37; and to *restore* the *preserved* of Israel;—wheresoever scattered, or however persecuted, still preserved *from extermination*, and still preserved a *distinct people*;—to *restore* them to the *favour of God*, and to his spiritual *service*; and perhaps to

their country and independence, Luke i, 69—75; Rom. xi, 26; Isa. xlix, 13—23; Jer. xxiii, 5—8.

2. But, seeing that the Jews are but a small part of the whole family of man, their restoration "is a *light* thing," in comparison with the enlightening of the Gentiles, and the salvation of the ends of the earth. The Gentile world was enveloped in the darkness of *ignorance*, *error*, and *superstition*. Wi ness all that was thought and practised, as to religion; the doubtings of their philosophers, and the superstitious performances of both them and the vulgar. And they were in the darkness of *misery*, *guilt*, and *condemnation;* "in darkness and the shadow of death," ver. 9; Luke i, 77—79, and iv, 18. To them, Jesus was, by his *doctrine*, a *light*—concerning the *invisible world;* teaching the unity and perfections of God; his providence and grace; and the proper method of approaching him, John iv, 24; Matt. vi, 26—30; John xiv, 6. He was a light,—concerning the *future world;* teaching the immortality of the soul, which even their wise men doubted; and the resurrection of the body, which they reckoned impossible. Besides this, he may be considered as affording *light* on most important subjects, by his *holy life*, his *vicarious death*, his *rising* as our *surety*, and his *ascension* as our *advocate*, &c. And he enlightens still by his *Spirit*, 2 Cor. iv, 6; and even by the *example of his followers*, Matt. v, 14—16; Phil. ii, 15.

But farther,—He is *God's salvation;* and, *therefore*, in all respects, a salvation suited to man's necessities. He finds us *guilty*, *condemned*, and *exposed to endless misery;* and he saves us by bearing our punishment *for* us, 1 Pet. ii, 24. He finds us *enslaved*, *defiled*, and unfit for heaven; and he saves us from thraldom and pollution by his Spirit working *in* us, Rom. viii, 2; Titus iii, 5; 2 Pet. i, 4. He finds *all* men, every where, *poor* and *helpless;* and he saves *to the end of the earth*, *freely*, *fully*, *eternally*, Heb. vii, 25; Rev. xxii, 17.

By way of *improvement*, we infer,

1. We ought very highly to value our souls. God does. And if we lose them, we lose all. Hence,

2. We should accept the salvation which God has so kindly sent us, Isa. lv, 1.

3. We should love him, who has manifested such love to us. And,

4. Give proof of our love, by submitting to him, who submitted to shame, and pain, and death, in our stead, John xiv, 15; 1 John v, 3.

5. We may confidently expect "all things necessary for life and godliness," Rom. viii, 22, *et seq.* And,

6. We should employ both our example and our influence to open the eyes of our fellow men to behold God's light, and their hearts to receive his salvation, Isa. lx, 1, and lxii, 1.

ZETA.

XXI.—*The Prophetic Report of Christ's Sufferings and Glory.*

ISAIAH liii, 1.

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

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1. AMONG the various evidences of the Christian religion, the *Old Testament prophecies* have ever been most justly included, for no one but God can enable mankind to foretel future contingencies; and we are sure, from his perfections, that he will never employ them in countenancing falsehood.

2. All the ancient prophecies which relate to Christ are considered, in the New Testament, as generally referring to his *sufferings* and *glory*. Thus St. Peter observes, The Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets, testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow, 1 Pet. i, 10;—and thus our Lord himself proves from the Scriptures, that the Messiah was to suffer, and then enter into his glory, Luke xxiv, 25, 26.—But of all the prophecies which describe the sufferings and glory of Christ, none are more striking and convincing than those contained in this chapter. Here we find the nature and design of his sufferings with the glory that would succeed and reward them, so clearly specified, that no historian could more accurately detail those events, after they had taken place, than our prophet does, more than seven hundred years before they occurred.

3. This remarkable chapter has, therefore, proved instrumental in silencing and convincing many daring infidels of *Gentile* extraction; and how any of the *Jewish* race could resist the evidence arising from these records, can be accounted for only by what our prophet elsewhere affirms; "For this people's hearts are waxed gross," &c, Isa. vi, 10; Matt. xiii, 15. But if the Jews had generally believed in Christ, this prophecy could not be

true; for that they would not believe, our text intimates, and laments, "Who hath," &c. In improving these words let us consider—the report here spoken of—the manner in which we are required to believe it—and the effect with which this belief is attended.

I. THE REPORT HERE SPOKEN OF. The word "report," is rendered "doctrine," in the margin, and undoubtedly means the doctrine of the gospel, or the joyful account of our redemption by Christ. This doctrine our prophet teaches in the subsequent verses of the chapter, from which we learn—the general contents—and the great importance, of that report to which our attention is now demanded.

1. *The general contents of this report.* It asserts the necessity of redemption, and exhibits the Redeemer provided for us. It asserts *the necessity of redemption*, arising from our sinful wandering;—"all we like sheep have gone astray," ver. 6;—we have gone astray like sheep;—this represents us as naturally degenerated, perishing, and helpless, Hos. xiii, 9;—we have all gone astray, and all need restoration, Psa. xiv, 2, 3;—but though naturally in a lost state, we need not despair; for our report—*exhibits the Redeemer provided for us.* It exhibits him as a *suffering Redeemer.* According to these predictions, the Messiah was to suffer in his *honour*, by contempt and rejection, ver. 2, 3;—in his *civil rights*, by unjust oppression, ver. 7, 8;—in his *soul*, by grief, ver. 3, 10;—in his *body*, by wounds, bruises, stripes, and mortal dissolution, ver. 5, 12. In all these respects, our Jesus *suffered.* He was despised as mean—and rejected as a deceiver by his own people, John i, 11;—he was unjustly oppressed by his accusers, his judge, and his executioners, Heb. xii, 3;—his soul was grieved in the garden, and on the cross, Matt. xxvi, 28, and xxvii, 46;—his body was wounded by the thorns, the nails, and the spear; and bruised by blows and buffetings; he endured stripes when scourged; and suffered the most painful death, by wicked hands, Acts ii, 23. But though a suffering Redeemer, our report also exhibits him as a *glorified Redeemer.* The Messiah was to be glorified after his sufferings, by *prolonging* his days, ver. 10;—by enjoying a portion with the *great*, ver. 12;—by *dividing* the spoil with the strong, ver. 12;—by the *prosperous* exercise of his authority, ver. 10;—and by *seeing his seed*, ver. 10;—or witnessing a most satisfactory family of redeemed children as the fruit of his sufferings, ver. 11. Thus our Jesus is *glorified;*—his days are prolonged by a triumphant resurrection.—He is great in dignity, Rev. iii, 21;—

possessions, John iii, 35;—authority, Phil. ii, 9–11;—and power, Matt. xxiii, 18.—He divides the spoil with the strong, by redeeming his subjects from the most potent enemies, Satan, sin, and death.—His government is prosperous, for his church is preserved, Matt. xvi, 18;—and his kingdom is extending, Daniel ii, 44.—His seed will be numerous, and his satisfaction great, Psa. ii, 3; Rev. vii, 9, 10; Isa. viii, 18. Having considered the contents of our report, let us observe,

2. *The great importance of it.* That it is the most important of all reports is evident,—because *it is universally interesting to all mankind;* for as all need redemption, so all are here assured that redemption is provided for them, ver. 6; Luke ii, 10, 11.—Because *it is a beneficial report;* many other reports yield little or no profit to those who hear them, but this conveys the greatest good to those who receive it; for both salvation and comfort are derived from it, Rom. i, 16; Psa. lxxxix, 15, 16.—Because *it is a true report*, being confirmed by the most commanding evidence, 1 Tim. i, 15. "This is a faithful saying," &c. Hence let us consider,

II. How we are required to believe it.

1. *We must believe it practically;* with our hearts unto righteousness, Rom. x, 10. Do you believe the *necessity of redemption*, in consequence of your wanderings from God? Then be concerned to obtain redemption; seek it before and above all things, Matt. vi, 33;—be humbled on account of your sins, Luke xv, 17, 18;—disclaim all pretensions to merit, Lam. iii, 22;—renounce vain hope of heaven hereafter, without holiness in this life, Heb. xii, 14;—earnestly cry to God for gracious restoration, Psa. cxix, 176. Do you believe that *a Redeemer is provided for you?* Then contemplate his sufferings as occasioned by your sins, and be contrite, Zech. xii, 10.—Consider his sufferings as the price paid for your redemption, and gratefully devote yourselves to him, 1 Cor. vi, 19, 20; Psa. cxvi, 16.—Consider him as your sacrifice, appointed by Divine mercy, and trust in his merit, Isa. xxviii, 16; Matt. xii, 21.—Consider the perfections of Christ;—his mercy in dying for you, ver. 12;—his love in still interceding for you, ver. 12;—his glorious power by which he is able to restore you;—and confidently expect salvation through him, Heb. vii, 25, and x, 19—22.

2. *We must believe in him seasonably, without delay.* This he requires, John xii, 36;—because your salvation is suspended on your believing, Mark xvi, 15, 16;—the season for your believing is limited, and may be outlived, Matt. xxiii, 37, 38;—

the period at which this season will terminate, is unknown, Matt. xxiv, 44;—the means of faith are now afforded you, and your unbelief will be inexcusable, Matt. xxii, 12;—your redeeming Lord is come, and calls for you; like Mary, arise quickly and come to him, John xi, 28, 29.

3. *We must believe perseveringly, and without declension;*—by abiding in Christ, 1 John ii, 28;—walking in him, Col. ii, 9;—and looking for his mercy, Jude 20, 21. In hope of this, consider,

III. THE EFFECT WITH WHICH THIS BELIEF IS ATTENDED. To those who believe as God requires, the arm of the Lord is revealed. By the arm of the Lord is meant his power; and the revealing of his arm to believers, must imply the exertion of his power in their behalf, Isa. lii, 9, 10. This power is exerted,

1. *In delivering them*, Isa. xix, 20;—from the burden of guilt, Matt. xi, 28;—from the power of Satan, Col. i, 12, 13;—from all distressing fears, Psa. xxxiv, 4, and cxvi, 8;—and from all sinful propensities, Psa. cxxx, 8. God's power is exerted,

2. *In blessing them*, Heb. vi, 13, 14. He blesses them with adoption into his family, John i, 12;—with restoration to his image, 2 Pet. i, 4;—and with all needful assistance in their various exercises, Isa. xli, 10. It is exerted,

3. *In keeping them*, Psa. cxxi, 5,—from the malice of enemies, Isa. xxvii, 3, and lvii, 17; Psa. xvii, 7;—and from spiritual declension, Jer. xvii, 7, 8; Psa. lxvi, 8, 9. It is exerted,

4. *In rewarding them*, with paradise at death, Luke xxiii, 43;—with a glorious resurrection, Phil. iii, 21;—and with eternal life, John iii, 16; Rom. ii, 6, 7.

APPLICATION.

1. Our text intimates that *faith and the knowledge of salvation are connected.* God's arm is *revealed* to believers; they have an interest in his gracious power, and they are comforted by the perception of it, Isa. xii, 1, 2; 2 Tim. i, 12. Examine yourselves!—Do you thus believe—practically, seasonably, perseveringly? If not, consider your alarming state, John iii, 18, 36;—implore God's manifested mercy, Psa. xc, 14;—and add confident faith to your fervent petition, James i, 5, 6. For observe,

2. *Our text demands and encourages the hope of believers.* Only believe as God requires you, then hope for all God has promised;—for deliverance, Luke i, 73–75;—for gracious help, Heb. iv, 16;—for continued preservation, 1 Pet. i, 5;—and for heavenly glory, Psa. xxxiv, 11.—Hope for all God has promised, because he has given his Son to you, Rom. viii, 32.

ALPHA.

XXII.—*Spiritual Health.*

ISAIAH liii, 5.

"With his stripes we are healed."

FOR the transcendent importance of its matter, and the minuteness and accuracy of its prophetical descriptions, this chapter occupies an unrivalled eminence amongst the writings of the Jewish seers. Here we have the humility of the Redeemer specified, ver. 2;—the contemptuous ideas of men respecting him described, ver. 3;—the acuteness of his sufferings asserted, ver. 8, 9;—the patience with which he endured his peerless sorrows anticipated, ver. 7;—and the grand design of the whole announced, ver. 4, 5, 6. Yea, such is the luminous and evangelical glory which pours upon our astonished vision in this portion of Scripture, that we almost forget that its inspired author lived near seven hundred years before the important events which he predicted took place; we are inadvertently rather inclined to associate him with the eye witnesses of the sorrows of the Son of God. Under the influence of these considerations, we do not wonder that even the licentious Rochester, when immured in the chamber of affliction, should, by a calm investigation of this chapter, have been fully convinced of the authenticity of those Scriptures which had before constituted the butt of his profane ridicule; and, through Divine mercy, rendered capable of subscribing to the words of our text, "With his stripes we are healed." With fervent aspirations to God for his blessing, let us proceed to discuss this truly interesting passage, in which we have,

I. A LAMENTABLE DISEASE ASSUMED.

II. AN INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN SPECIFIED.

III. HIS MODE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED.

IV. AN EXTRAORDINARY CURE ASSERTED.

I. As there can be no cure effected where no disease exists, the assumption of disease is inseparably connected with this passage. The sacred Scriptures abound with figurative modes of expression; hence the diseases of the body have been used as a medium of representing the moral pravity of human na-

ture, Isa. i, 5, 6; Jer. viii, 21, 22. In attending to the prophet's figure, we shall consider the spiritual disease of man, as,

1. *The baneful result of transgression.* When God had formed man of the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, he pronounced him "very good," and doubtless this approving testimony had both a moral and a physical application; but, alas! how are the mighty fallen!—how unlike the production of a holy and omniscient Being!—Man unhappily violated the paradisiacal commandment—mingled his pristine glory in the abyss of ruin—and introduced a hideous train of ills, of every shape and size:—and among these, a fixed inveterate aptitude to evil, holds a very prominent place, Gen. iii, 1—8; Rom. v, 12.

2. *Universal in its prevalence.* Some diseases of the body affect particular parts; others diffuse their influence through the whole system. This moral disease pervades the whole man; every member of the body, and every faculty of the soul, is thoroughly infected and deranged, Gen. vi, 5; Job xviii, 4; Mark viii, 21, 22;—and these baneful effects of the fall are diffused through the whole human kind. As totally as the man is fallen and depraved, so is the whole of his species involved in ruin; infancy—childhood—youth—and tottering age—present indisputable evidence in proof of this humbling fact, Isa. liii, 6; Rom. iii, 10, 11, 23.

3. *Hereditary in its descent.* Some diseases of the body are unhappily entailed on posterity, and are transmitted in regular succession from father to son:—of this nature is the moral malady assumed in our text;—it has descended in one unbroken line, from the first guilty pair in Eden's garden, down to your preacher and his present audience;—hence no happy intervening age of paradisiacal innocence has adorned the page of history;—hence the biographical details of ages have not broken the painful monotony of human guilt, by the exhibition of one happy individual in a state of unmixed, underived, pristine purity. The lineaments of moral pravity in the father, have been strikingly manifest in the son, Gen. iv, 1—8, viii, 21.

4. *Incurable by human energy.* The diseases of the human body frequently baffle the utmost skill of the medical science. All the wisdom and power of man have been exercised to impede the progress of this spiritual malady, but to little or no purpose;—the senators of Greece and Rome have enacted laws, and the philosophers of both countries have disseminated their ethics abroad; but the radical principle of evil in the human

breast has defied all their efforts—nothing less than a Divine Physician can effect a cure, Job xiv, 4; Jer. xiii, 23.

II. AN INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN SPECIFIED. Man has not been abandoned to his spiritual self-induced malady, without hope or help;—mercy has interposed—a physician has been provided—and one possessing the most ample qualifications, John iii, 14—17. He is,

1. *Infinite in wisdom.* Wisdom is necessary in order both to understand the disease, and properly to apply the remedy. Jesus, our Divine Physician, is "the wisdom of God."—He comprehends our spiritual affliction in all its ramifications—he cannot be deceived by false appearances, for "he knoweth what is in man, and needeth not that any should tell him," Jer. xvii, 9, 10; John i, 1—5, 14.

2. *Impartial in his attendance.* Man in every station in life, is susceptive of partial feeling; the medical profession cannot be expected to be free from its influences. The splendour of the palace, and the grandeur of nobility, are more attractive than the humble cottage of the peasant;—but the physician before us, is equally attentive to high and low—rich and poor—learned and illiterate;—yea, and is able to attend to the necessities of all at the same moment, Ezek. xxxiii, 17—19; Mark x, 46—52; Luke vii, 1—10.

3. *Ever easy of access.* Medical practitioners of great celebrity, in order to secure leisure for the purposes of health and domestic duties, are obliged to render themselves inaccessible at certain periods; but Jesus, the infallible Physician of souls, is ever easy of approach. This appears evident from his kind invitations, Isa. i, 18; Matt. xi, 28, 29;—his solemn declarations, Ezek. xxxiii, 11, 12; Matt. xxii, 37;—and his gracious promises, John vi, 37; 1 John i, 9;—as also from the uniform testimony of experience, in all ages, Psa. xxxiv, 18, cxviii, 21; Rom. x, 12, 13.

4. *Gratuitous in his practice.* It is just and proper that the exercise of skill and attention should be reasonably remunerated. But such is the peculiar excellence of this spiritual Physician, that a cure can only be obtained on gratuitous terms. The salvation of the gospel is "without money, and without price;" and this method of deliverance is exactly adapted to our ruined condition, Isa. lv, 1, 2; Rom. iii, 24; Eph. ii, 8—10.

III. HIS MODE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED;—"With his stripes." The stripes which were inflicted on the blessed Redeemer, were connected with that death to which he gave him-

self for the life of the world, when "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree." This atonement, and faith in this atonement, are the only means of a sinner's acceptance with God; the only method by which a cure can be obtained, John iii, 36. This method is,

1. *Divine in its appointment.* It is not the fruit of the human imagination; the production of councils, or synods, however learned, or important: but the offspring of Jehovah; it comes to us under the sanction of the Deity, Isaiah xxviii, 16; John iii, 16, 17.

2. *Easy in its application.* Not animal oblations—tedious pilgrimages—a course of painful penance—nor any of the other inventions of human error;—but "repent and believe." The power is given, and its exercise is required, Acts iii, 19, xvi, 31.

3. *Universal in its adaptation.* The gospel way of salvation is admirably suited to all the possible constitutions, situations, and conditions of men, of every "nation, kindred, people, and tongue," Rom. x, 4—13; Acts ii, 9—11; 37—42.

4. *Infallible in its efficacy.* No case is too intricate, none too desperate, to admit of a cure: no individual in any age of time, ever made a Scriptural application and was disappointed. The antediluvian saints realized its efficacy by an anticipating faith; the evangelists and apostles by immediate application; and believers since, by a retrospective reference to the sacrifice of Christ, have proved that he is "able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him."

IV. An extraordinary cure asserted;—"We are healed." Were mortal ears susceptible of celestial testimony, the loud hosannas of the blood-washed throng on high would amply support this assertion; and multitudes of terrestrial saints would echo back the sound! Can we from experience adopt the sentiment?—This cure may be considered, as,

1. *Radical in its nature.* The cure effected by this Physician is not the removal of external symptoms, while the principle is unrenovated; not breaking off a few gross evils, while the seat of depravity is untouched; but, the understanding is enlightened; the will divinely influenced; the affections properly directed; the imagination spiritualized; and the memory sanctified; in short, the heart entirely changed, Ezek. xxxvi, 26; 2 Cor. v, 17.

2. *Convincing in its evidence.* Whenever a cure is effected there are visible proofs of such restoration: so in the case before us, when a sin-sick soul has made application to Jesus Christ in a Scriptural manner, and has realized his saving efficacy, the

effect is manifest; the faculties have received a new tone, and this renovation appears in holy tempers, spiritual conversation, and an upright, conscientious, line of conduct, Gal. v, 22—24; 2 Pet. i, 5—7.

3. *Happy in its influence.* Of this there cannot be a doubt entertained for a moment. Personally, the peace of God is enjoyed; divine support under affliction experienced; succour in hour of temptation realized; and the joys of heaven anticipated. In the family the sacred Scriptures are read; prayer regularly offered; diligence and economy promoted; and the salvation of dependants sought. In reference to the world, intercession is offered up; exhortation and reproof are administered; and religion recommended by pious example, Rom. v, 1; Josh. xxiv, 15; 1 Thess. ii, 10.

This subject tends, 1. To promote humility. 2. To produce self-examination. 3. To excite to fervent gratitude. 4. To encourage the desponding penitent.

OMICRON.

XXIII.—*The Joyful Proclamation.*

ISAIAH lxii, 11.

"Behold the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him."

FROM the very nature of prophecy, it must generally involve a degree of obscurity, which can only be fully removed by its accomplishment. But it is evident, that all the prophetic testimonies are not *equally* mysterious and difficult to comprehend. Some of them are *comparatively* plain and intelligible to the weakest capacity, and leave no reasonable doubt of their precise import and application. This is particularly observable in many of Isaiah's predictions of the promised Messiah, and the inestimable blessings of his kingdom. And though he frequently employs the most beautiful imagery, and describes with inimitable sublimity of language, the most glorious and important events, yet his writings in general are more distinct and perspicuous than the other prophets.—This chapter *primarily* predicts the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; and very

probably refers to their *final restoration* as the people of God. But it also manifestly announces the propagation and triumphs of the gospel; and contains the most encouraging promises of the universal diffusion of divine knowledge, and the future prosperity of the Christian church.—The text may therefore be regarded as the Lord's general commission to the prophet, and to all his faithful ministers, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation throughout the world, both to Jews and Gentiles, "Behold the Lord hath proclaimed it," &c. Let us observe,

I. THIS PROCLAMATION EXHIBITS A GLORIOUS OBJECT;—"Behold thy *salvation* cometh." Such is the distinguished character of the Messiah. He is a *Saviour*. He *saves his* people from their sins, and is therefore called *their salvation*. For this purpose he came into the world—was delivered for our offences—and now ever liveth to make intercession for us. His saving character is perfectly such as our necessities require.

1. *He is the appointed Saviour*. When we had destroyed ourselves, in God was found help. He loved the world and sent his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him.—As the mediator of the new covenant, Jesus is frequently called God's *servant*, because he assumed humanity, that he might accomplish his *will*, and finish the *work* which he had given him to do, Isa. liii, 11; Heb. x, 5—7; John iv, 34. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all," and exalted him with his right hand, to be a prince and a *Saviour*.—It thus "pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell," for the salvation of perishing sinners.

2. *He is the all-sufficient Saviour*. He is both divinely authorized, and infinitely qualified, to execute his saving office. He is "the propitiation for our sins," and hath obtained eternal redemption for mankind. In him, there is an inexhaustible plenitude of grace and truth. Millions have put their trust in him, and have proved the virtue of his name, Rev. vii, 13, 14;—and he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He can save the vilest sinners, and will cast out none that come unto him. However *multiplied* our crimes—however *aggravated* our guilt—and however *deep* the *stains* of our depravity may be, Jesus is *able* and *willing* to redeem us from all iniquity, and save us to the uttermost, Psa. cxxx, 7, 8; Matt. xi, 28; Heb. vii, 25.

3. *He is the only possible Saviour*. There is no other way to the Father; nor any other mediator between God and man; "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which

is Jesus Christ." He alone has bought with a price, and can save us from wrath to come. He has been the *only Saviour* of his people in every age, Isa. xlv, 21, 22. Salvation is not the scheme of angelic wisdom, nor the production of human energy; but the special purchase of Christ's infinite merit, and the sovereign achievement of his omnipotent power, Titus iii, 4—7. No other Saviour is *necessary*, nor can other be *found;* for "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." *Behold thy salvation!*

II. THIS PROCLAMATION CONTAINS A GRACIOUS MESSAGE;—"Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold," &c. Whatever reference these words might have to Cyrus, who proclaimed liberty to the captive Jews, they more eminently describe the *office* and *work* of Christ, as the Redeemer and Saviour of sinners. Observe,

1. *His mysterious advent;*—"Behold he cometh." He had long been promised as the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed. To him gave all the prophets witness, and greatly rejoiced in the anticipation of his manifestation in the flesh, 1 Pet. i, 10, 11.—Behold, now he *is come!* "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." He is Immanuel, God with us.—'God with God, is man with men.' Glorious mystery! Infallible truth! Matchless love! 1 Tim. iii, 16; 2 Cor. viii, 9.

2. *His important mission;*—"*His work* before him." What an infinite work did he engage to accomplish! It includes all that he has *done* and *suffered* to redeem and save the world. His human incarnation—perfect righteousness—atoning sacrifice—triumphant resurrection—glorious ascension—and prevailing intercession, Rom. viii, 3, 34.—The work of *redemption* he gloriously *finished* in the days of his flesh, Heb. ix, 4.—But the work of *salvation* is still *before him*, in which he is *perpetually engaged*, and will not cease to carry it on, till he has *fully* accomplished all the designs of his mediatorial engagements, 1 Cor. xv, 24—28.

3. *His glorious recompence;*—"His *reward* is with him." In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and all the unsearchable riches of salvation. From his infinite fulness he freely and abundantly communicates the richest blessings to his believing people;—he enlightens their minds—justifies their persons—liberates their souls—purifies their hearts—and inspires them with "joy unspeakable and full of glory;"—he graciously bestows an inestimable treasure of *grace* here, and an ineffable reward of *glory* hereafter, 1 John iii, 2. This message

must be published in all nations;—"The Lord hath proclaimed," &c.

III. THIS PROCLAMATION DEMANDS SPECIAL ATTENTION.—The threefold repetition of the term *behold*, in the text, intimates the vast *importance* of the subject introduced, and the absolute *necessity* of attentively regarding the Saviour as proclaimed by the prophet. We should behold him,

1. *With devout admiration.* He is the most *glorious* and *interesting* object. He is altogether lovely in his person, character, works, and offices. How great is his beauty, and how infinite his goodness! Behold his astonishing love, his attractive dignity, and his captivating grace! Embrace his truth—bow to his sceptre—and imitate his example;—supremely adore his exalted name—and affectionately exclaim, "This is my *beloved*, and this is my *friend*."

2. *With believing application.* The Saviour is not an object of *sight*, but of *faith*. Beholding him, therefore, is an *act* of the *mind*, under the influence of his Spirit. By faith we *look* to him—*come* to him—*receive* him—and *trust* in him, as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John i, 12; Eph. i, 13. *Such* a beholding Christ, is always accompanied with a personal interest in his merits, and a participation of present salvation.

3. *With joyful anticipation.* "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."—It looks to the unseen Saviour, and joyfully expects his *second appearing*, without sin unto salvation. The believer looks through all sufferings and discouragements, and greatly rejoices in hope of the glory of God—having a "desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better," Phil. iii, 20, 21; Col. iii, 3, 4. May all mankind speedily hear the joyful proclamation of the gospel—behold the ineffable glories of the Redeemer—and participate the exceeding riches of his grace!

ETA.

XXIV.—*The Stroke of Death under the Direction of God.*

EZEKIEL XXIV, 16.

"Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke."

IN this chapter we are informed, that Ezekiel, while a captive in Babylon, received a command from God, to predict the destruction of Jerusalem. This he does,

1. *By the figure or parable of a boiling pot*, ver. 1—14. Here the pot represents the city of Jerusalem; the contents of the pot represent the Jewish people; and the fire represents those dreadful judgments and trials, by which God designed both to punish and purify this people. He predicts the destruction of Jerusalem,

2. *By the occurrence of an affecting domestic calamity*, ver. 15—24. The calamity referred to, was the death of the prophet's wife.—This bereavement he was forbidden to lament:—and hereby Ezekiel became "a sign to his people," ver. 24: in showing them that their national calamities would be so great as to exceed all lamentation, or such as no sorrow could express. Thus the mournful event announced in our text was improved by the prophet for the benefit of others. Let us imitate him; and, for the purpose of promoting the general good, observe, from these words,—that social connections are *desirable* enjoyments; she was "the desire of his eyes:"—that these enjoyments are subject to the stroke of *death;* she was taken away from the prophet by a stroke:—and, that the stroke of death is under the direction of *God;*—it was the *Lord* that took her away; "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." We are instructed by our text to observe,

I. THAT SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ARE DESIRABLE ENJOYMENTS. These connections are various, and justly desirable.

1. *They are various;* being derived from different sources. Some are founded in *consanguinity*, or oneness of blood; such were those of Israelites, whom Moses urged to peace, Acts vii, 26.—Some are founded in *affinity*, or matrimonial alliance,

such are the most endearing and indissoluble connections of life, Matt. xix, 5.—Some are founded in *friendship*, or union of hearts, formed by mutual benevolence; such was that which existed between David and the lovely Jonathan, 1 Sam. xviii, 1.—And some are founded in *piety*, or an affectionate concern to promote each other's salvation: such was that of Timothy and the Philippians, Phil. ii, 20. But from whatever sources they may be derived,

2. These connections are *justly desirable*. They are so, because—our present state is a state of *ignorance*, and society is favourable to the attainment of useful knowledge, Prov. xi, 14, and xiii, 29:—our present state is a state of *weakness* and danger, and society affords help—in bearing burdens—performing duties—and resisting enemies, Eccl. iv, 9—12:—our present state is a state of *affliction;* and society is productive of mutual comfort, 1 Thess. v, 11; Psa. cxxxiii, 1:—our present state is a state of *probation;* and society promotes our eternal interests. This it does—by rendering us capable of extensive usefulness, Gal. vi, 10;—by preserving us from apostasy, Heb. iii, 12, 13; and by exciting us to holy diligence, Heb. x, 25. Hence we should recollect—*our obligations to God for relative comforts*. It was God that first gave them to us, Psa. lxviii, 6;—and he continues them with us, Psa. lxvi, 9. Our subject also teaches us, *The wisdom of employing our social influence for pious purposes*. Excellent examples of this we find in the histories of Jonathan and David, 1 Sam. xxiii, 16; Psa. xxxiv, 1—3. This improves our social comforts while enjoyed, Prov. xii, 25, and xv, 23;—and this affords pleasing reflections, when these comforts are taken from us, Job xxix, 13, 15, 16, 25. The present comforts of society cannot long remain with us, for our text teaches us,

II. THAT THESE ENJOYMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO THE STROKE OF DEATH. From the precarious state of life, and its enjoyments, we may observe,

1. *The stroke of death should be expected by us all*. Death is impartial in the infliction of his stroke:—no mortal is exempted from it, Eccl. viii, 8;—however useful to society—however beloved by mankind—however dear to God—all must die, 2 Sam. xiv, 14; Eccl. iii, 20; Heb. ix, 27.

2. *We should seriously prepare for the stroke of death;*—because death is awfully *important in its effects*, as it fixes our eternal state beyond the possibility of any future alteration, Luke xvi, 26; Rev. xxii, 11. *To prepare for death is the great busi-*

ness of life, 2 Pet. iii, 14;—and *it is our highest wisdom to consider death aright*, Deut. xxxii, 29; Psa. xc, 12.

3. *Our preparation for this stroke should be habitual.* We should immediately *seek* this preparation, and very carefully *retain* it, because the time when this stroke will be laid on us is *to us* unknown, Matt. xxiv, 44. The stroke of death may fall on us either at the *midnight* of old age—or in the *evening* of declining years—or at the *noon* of middle age—or in the *morning* of blooming youth. Of death's ravages at all those seasons, we have frequent instances, Eccl. xii, 5;—and all such occurrences strongly enforce the wise Preacher's admonition, "What thy hand," &c, Eccl. ix, 10.

4. *The saint's recovery from this stroke should be anticipated*, by *faith* in God's promises, Hos. xiii, 14; Phil. iii, 21;—and *hope* of renewed communion with saints in heavenly glory 1 Thess. v, 8—10, and iv, 16, 17; Rev. i, 18. This reminds us,

III. THAT THE STROKE OF DEATH IS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GOD. It is the Lord that takes away our connections by this stroke. This is a most reconciling and even consoling truth.

1. *The death of our pious friends is only a removal; it is not annihilation;*—they *still live with* God, 1 Thess. v, 10;—and *to* him, Luke xx, 38.—They are *taken away from* toil, sorrow, and danger, Rev. vii, 16;—they are taken away, *to* complete rest, happiness, and security, Rev. xiv, 13.

2. *They are taken away by God;*—by God, their *proprietor*, who had a right to dispose of them, Matt. xx, 15;—by God their *rewarder*, who has taken them, to crown them, 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8;—by God, *our benefactor*, who kindly indulged us with their society, 1 Tim. vi, 7. Hence, his *hand*, in their removal, should be piously *acknowledged*, both with resignation and gratitude. Job i, 21.

3. *They are taken away with a wise and gracious design*—for *their benefit*, perhaps, by removal from evil to come, Isa. lvii, 1: and certainly to serve and enjoy God, in a better world, Rev. vii, 14, 15;—and for *our benefit*, by weaning us from earth, Mic. ii, 10;—and by urging us to renewed diligence. Their removal silently, but pathetically, says to us, "Be ye not slothful," &c. Heb. vi, 12.

ALPHA.

XXV.—*Faith and Hope in God.*

MICAH vii, 7.

"Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

THE LORD JEHOVAH is a never-failing source of consolation to his believing people; in their most trying circumstances he is their refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble. In him, therefore, they put their trust, and receive ample supplies of mercy and grace in every time of need. Thus the prophet Micah trusted in his God, and was not confounded in the midst of abounding wickedness; when he was called to the prophetic office, the people, both of Juda and Israel, were exceedingly corrupted and impious. They had awfully forsaken the God of their fathers, and profanely despised and neglected his ordinances. This prophet was, therefore, commissioned to denounce the Divine judgment against them—to warn them of their perilous state—and exhort them to escape impending ruin, by immediate repentance and reformation. And, in the preceding verses, he addresses the few who were pious among them, by way of *caution*, against treacherous friendships, and creature confidence; and by way of *encouragement*, to trust solely in the Saviour of Israel, for preservation and deliverance. And in the text, either in the name of all the faithful, or in his own name, he expresses an unshaken faith and hope in God for every blessing;—"I will look unto the Lord," &c. These words announce—the prophet's *resolution*—the prophet's *confidence*—and the prophet's *encouragement*.

I. THE PROPHET'S RESOLUTION;—"I will look unto the Lord," &c. This pious determination was evidently the result of eminent wisdom, and prompt decision of character; it discovers a devout and gracious state of mind, and regards both the *active character* of faith, and the *patient exercise* of hope. It describes,

1. *The active character of faith;*—"I will look unto the Lord." Man is unquestionably in a state of absolute dependance; we feel innumerable wants which we are incompetent to supply: all men, therefore, look for foreign help, Psa. iv, 6.—

But mankind in general trust only in the vanity of the creature, and not in the ability of the Creator. The prophet, however, was taught of the Lord, and made a happier choice; and, like him, all the righteous, knowing the character and all-sufficiency of Jehovah, resolve to confide in him for every needful communication. *Looking* unto the Lord, is *a vigorous act of the mind*, or *living faith*, which is the only way of salvation. It is only through the mediation of Christ, under the influence of his Spirit, that sinners can look unto him and be saved, Isa. xlv, 22. This *vital principle* includes—a full renunciation of self-dependance—an implicit confidence in Divine perfections and promises, and an entire devotion of the heart and life to his service, Gal. ii, 20.

2. *The patient exercise of hope.*—"I will *wait* for the God of my salvation." Genuine faith is invariably productive of practical piety;—if we *believe* in God, we shall delight in *waiting upon* him in fervent devotion; and *waiting for* him in earnest expectation.—Faith *grasps* the Divine promises, and hope *realizes* their actual accomplishment. *Waiting for* the Lord is not a *suspension* of mental activity, nor a *cessation* of personal exertion;—it is a lively exercise of the mind, *ardently desiring* and *diligently seeking* the blessings of salvation in all the duties and ordinances of the Gospel, Psa. cxxx, 5, 6.—We should *thus wait* for the manifestations of God's favour, and for the communications of his grace, in every vicissitude and circumstance of life. We must *wait for him*, humbly—believingly—faithfully—patiently—and perseveringly—in all the means of his appointment, Lam. iii, 25, 26. The happy result of such conduct will appear, if we consider,

II. THE PROPHET'S CONFIDENCE;—"My God, the God of my salvation." This is the language of humble *assurance*. Genuine religion is spiritual operation, and is therefore its own evidence. The effects which it produces, prove its actual existence, and are accompanied with an *internal witness* of its personal enjoyment. This confidence enables the believer, with the prophet, to "rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation."

1. *The inestimable portion claimed;*—"My God." This is one of the most comprehensive and consoling declarations in the sacred writings. It is the distinguishing promise of the new covenant, "I will be *your God*, and ye shall be my people." This is happily realized in the experience of all the saints. God is not only *theirs* in the *natural relations* of creation and pre-

servation; but he is also theirs by the *special engagements* of his covenant, and the *benefits* of *salvation*. They are personally *interested* in all the perfections of his character—the blessings of redemption—and the promises of his Gospel. They are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." He dwells in them by his Spirit, and grants them the witness of their adoption, by which they confidently claim him as their *reconciled* God, and *satisfying* portion, Rom. viii, 14—16; Lam. iii, 24.

2. *The unspeakable privilege enjoyed;*—"The God of *my salvation*." The prophet had obtained mercy of the Lord, and was a partaker of his saving influence. But he still *believingly waited* for the *progressive* and *perfect* accomplishment of the work which he had already begun. And *thus* all the righteous are subjects of *present* salvation, and *heirs* of eternal life. They gratefully attribute all the work of grace to the Lord their God, and constantly look to be saved by him from all their enemies and afflictions—from the sting and fear of death—from the terror and power of the grave—and from the miseries of everlasting destruction, 1 Cor. xv, 54—57. "Salvation belongeth to the Lord." He provides, promises, and imparts it to them that believe, Eph. ii, 8—10. He is therefore emphatically the *God of their salvation*. Such experience naturally suggests,

III. THE PROPHET'S ENCOURAGEMENT;—"My God *will hear me*." This persuasion afforded him inexpressible consolation. The rebellious Jews rejected his message, and despised his faithful admonitions. But he rejoiced to *know* that his God would propitiously *hear* and *answer* his pious devotions. He was therefore encouraged,

1. *By his communion with God;*—"My God will *hear* me." He was evidently a man of prayer. He maintained *daily intercourse* with his Maker, and found the most sacred pleasure and profit in his worship. Fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, is the exalted privilege of all his people. They not only deem it their *bounden duty*, but they also esteem it their *highest honour* to address the God of all grace. To him they approach with the grateful and affectionate confidence of children, and unbosom all their secrets—relate their sorrows—and make known their requests, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. What a delightful and encouraging employment! Surely it is good and blessed to draw near to God, and *spiritually converse* with the Father of mercies, Psalms lxxiii, 28.

2. *By his expectation from God;*—"My God *will hear me*."

His faith was strong, and his hope well founded. He was not *presumptuous* in his confidences, nor *enthusiastic* in his anticipation. He *knew* that God would hear him, from the *authority of Scripture*. He was not unacquainted with the many promises which the Lord had *then* given to answer the prayers of his faithful servants. He had also the *evidence of experience* to encourage his expectation;—his God had frequently *heard* his prayers, and *granted* his requests. And such are still *sources* of encouragement to all the pious. The *promises* and *goodness* of God should excite our confidence, and promote gratitude and praise. He will assuredly answer the supplications of them that "worship him in the beauty of holiness," Psa. xci, 15, 16; Matt. vii, 7, 8; 1 John v, 14, 15. Let us then consider the *folly* of trusting in the world for happiness, and the *necessity* of looking to God for salvation. Lo, "this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death."

ETA.

XXVI.—*Christian Communion encouraged.*

MALACHI iii, 16, 17.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

EVER since men began to multiply upon the earth, they have very generally been forgetful of him in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They have not, indeed, in every age and place been equally thoughtless and wicked; yet, with a few exceptions, the description given by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, has been strikingly and awfully exemplified;—"There is none that seeketh after God; there is no fear of God before their eyes," Rom. iii, 11—18. But, notwithstanding this, the LORD has always had in the world a church, against which the gates of hell have not prevailed. It is true, its members have sometimes been few and feeble, and oppressed; yet, though cast down, they have not been destroyed;

though persecuted, they have not been forsaken of their God, 2 Cor. iv, 8—10. Our text furnishes a record of these facts. And, since to such as are now engaged in conflicts and difficulties similar to those which exercised the saints of former times, a contemplation of their example cannot fail to be useful, we would point their attention to the characters here described, and the advantages attached to those characters.

I. THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED;—"They *feared* the Lord;" here we have the *principle* which actuated them:—they "*thought* upon his name;"—the *inward* evidence:—and they "*spake often* one to another;"—the *outward* effect of that principle.

1. *They feared the Lord.* In this something is implied; namely, that they regarded the object of their fear, as being *wise*—to know all their conduct and their circumstances: *powerful*—to punish or reward, according as men's actions might be evil or good; and *righteous*—to distinguish properly between the one and the other, and to render to every one the just recompense of his deeds. Yet it does not follow, as some may be ready to suppose, that they spent their life in painful inquietude and distraction; sorely apprehensive lest, because of their former sins, they should be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." There is, indeed, a fear which produces such effects. Such is that felt by *devils*, James ii, 19; and sometimes by *men*, who have respect only to the *justice* of God; and who, in respect to his mercy and love, are full of unbelief and despair. This has been, by divines, denominated 'a *slavish* fear,' because, like the fear a slave feels of a tyrant's lash; and it is thereby contradistinguished from, 'a *filial* fear,'—that generous respectful reverence, which leads a dutiful child carefully to avoid whatever would be offensive to an affectionate parent; not because of the parent's power to punish, but from a dread of grieving the parent's heart. To this purpose the Psalmist; "With thee is *forgiveness*, (not *vengeance*,) that thou mayest be *feared*," Psa. cxxx, 4. We should also remark, that "the fear of the Lord," in the language of the Old Testament, means, what may be called the entire religious principle, or the whole of inward religion, Gen. xx, 11; Psa. cxi, 10; Prov. xxviii, 28. And we may venture to assure ourselves, that the persons mentioned in our text were not distracted or gloomy; but that they found wisdom's ways to be peace and pleasantness: for,

2. *They thought upon the name of the Lord.* Names are signs, used to distinguish one person from another. In most cases they are arbitrary signs, which serve merely to identify those

persons to whom they belong. Not so "the name of the Lord;" this expresses essential qualities of his nature: see Exod. xxxiv, 5-7;—"The LORD God, *merciful* and *gracious*," &c. These persons "thought upon" *the whole* of this revelation; and, of course, expected whatever of pardon and help a gracious and merciful God could bestow. Besides this, he had assumed other titles. He was their *rock* and *strength*;—they rested on him for succour. Their *shepherd*;—they trusted in him for supplies. Their *father*;—they looked to him for that paternal direction their infancy and ignorance required. Their *king*;—they reposed under his protection, &c. In short, their hearts were fully impressed with those sentiments, "The LORD God is a sun and shield," &c, Psa. lxxxiv, 11.

3. *They spake often one to another*;—on what particular subjects, we must gather from the circumstances of the case. 1. As were their thoughts, such was their conversation, Matt. xii, 35. They therefore spake of *God's gracious dealings* with them, and of the *mercies*, whether personal or family, bodily or spiritual, temporal or eternal, which he had bestowed, or engaged to bestow, on them. A *second* topic of conversation may have been, the *opposition* they had to encounter, not from open persecution, for the laws prevented that, but from a wicked priesthood, ch. ii, 7, 8; and from an irreligious and hypocritical people, ch. i, 7, 8, and iii, 7, 15: in whose estimation these *Pietists*, *Puritans*, or *Methodists*, were "righteous over much;" 'their life madness, and their end without honour.' A *third* subject of discourse, probably, was the *deliverance* they had often experienced in seasons of temptation and distress, &c; and, in some instances, perhaps their *restoration* to God's favour, forfeited by yielding to temptation, Psa. lxvi, 16, lxxiii, 2, ciii, 12. And "they spake *often*," &c, in the way of *instruction*;—those who possessed a greater share of information and experience giving such advice and direction as they were qualified to impart:—in the way of *admonition*, wherever danger was perceived;—and in the way of *encouragement*, to those who were in heaviness through manifold and severe temptations, Psa. xl, 1—3; Isa. lix, 1.

II. THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED BY THOSE CHARACTERS may be comprised in three particulars,—divine approbation—divine security—divine promise.

1. *Divine approbation*;—"The LORD hearkened and heard it." It was despised by the profane; but *he* deigned to listen to it: and as it was calculated and intended to promote his glory, he must needs approve of it. The word employed means as

much in other places, whether as applied to man, as Isa. lv, 3; or to God, as Psa. lxvi, 18, 19; John ix, 31. And his approbation is sufficiently expressed in the phrase which asserts,

2. *Divine security;*—"A book of remembrance was written," &c. This is the language of accommodation, and in allusion to the practice of kings; who cause a record to be made as *a security* to meritorious individuals, that their services shall not be overlooked, Esther vi, 1. Those records, however, may be *destroyed*, or *forgotten*, as in the case of Mordecai; but this is an imperishable and never-forgotten impression of their case on the mind of God himself, Isa. xlix, 14, 15. Hence,

3. *Divine promise.* "They shall be mine," &c, "and I will spare," &c. 1. They are regarded as *jewels*, (see margin.) Jewels are purchased at a *great price;*—these with the precious blood of Christ, 1 Pet. i, 17. Jewels are held in *great esteem;*—so these, both in life and death, Deut. xxxii, 10; Psa. cxvi, 15. Jewels are watched over with *great care;*—so in the present instance, Isa. xxvii, 3. Jewels are, finally, treasured up in a place of *great honour and safety;*—these shall be,

> 'Far from a world of grief and sin,
> With God eternally shut in.'

2. But it is intimated that the day when God shall "*make up* his jewels"—shall gather them out from among the *rubbish* and *refuse*—will be a day of severe calamity; see chap. iv, 1. Yet, then, he who now regards them as his *children*, 2 Cor. vi, 18, "will *spare* them;"—will preserve them *tenderly*, Psa. ciii, 13;—and *effectually*, ver. 18, and iv, 2, 3, "as a man spareth *his own* son that serveth him."—On this part of our subject a parent's feelings furnish the best comment.

APPLICATION.

Are we the characters described? If not, how highly does it behove us to "come out from among" the ungodly, and to fear him, who is infinitely *wise*, and *just*, and *powerful*, and who will *not clear the guilty!* Objection.—'Man is for social life; and company is essential to our happiness.' Answer.—For this very reason you should join yourselves to God's people. Evil men *must* produce evil communications, which corrupt good manners; and "a *companion of fools* shall be destroyed," but "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise." A *set time* and *place* for religious conversation will be generally necessary, to ensure its attainment, and to prevent the intrusion of other subjects.

Let those who are in the habit of meeting together for this purpose, remember the *spirit* and *intention* of their meeting, and also that encouraging saying, "Where two or three are gathered together," &c, Matt. xviii, 20.

ZETA.

XXVII.—*The Debtor's Prayer.*

MATTHEW vi, 10.

"Forgive us our debts."

THIS petition is taken from that comprehensive and well known compendium of devotion, which we call, for the sake of distinction, the Lord's prayer. A prayer which Christ condescended to teach his disciples; and a prayer which is designed to be a model for all our prayers. Forms of prayer were common among the Jews, and every public teacher presented one to his disciples; these forms were sometimes drawn out to a considerable length, and from them abridgments were not unfrequently made. We have the satisfaction to learn from God himself what prayer is, and what language we should use in our addresses to the throne of grace; and when a sovereign dictates a petition which he allows condemned culprits to present to him, who can question his willingness to grant their request?—The text is of universal consequence, and suggests to us;—that we have debts,—that these debts may be forgiven,—and that it is highly important and desirable for us to obtain forgiveness.

I. WHAT ARE OUR DEBTS? This term *debts*, is by St. Luke ii, 4, rendered *sins*. St. John defines sin as a transgression of the law; of that particular law which every man is under to God. Jesus Christ has seen fit to reduce the whole of the moral law, which in the Old Testament is amplified into various precepts, into two positive injunctions. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," &c, Matt. xxii, 37—39. God's law is *universally binding;* wherever there are rational creatures in any part of the creation, there they are obligated to love God according to the extent of their capacities.—*It can never be abrogated.* Human laws change, worldly maxims vary, and many of the Jewish precepts were designed only for a single people and to

be in use for a certain period, but this law is unchangeable. *It allows of no deviation.* It requires perfect, uniform, and undeviating obedience; and every man, through all the periods of his being, with an unchangeable intensity of desire, is required to love God, &c. This law we have all violated in instances innumerable.—We have done it, by omitting to do what the law positively enjoins; and by doing what the law plainly prohibits. —These deviations, sins, or trespasses, are in the text termed *debts.*

1. *Debts suppose two parties, the one of which has received goods, valuables, or commodities from the other.* This is our case. From God we have received all we possess; we owe our being to him, Acts xvii, 25—28. Our bodies are his workmanship, Psa. cxxxix, 13—16. He is the father of our spirits, Heb. xii, 9. For our property we are indebted to his blessing, Deut. viii, 18. He fixeth the bounds of our habitation, Acts xvii, 27. Indeed to each of us it may be said, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

2. *Debts imply, that the returns made have not been proportioned to the property received.* Here also we all stand impeached. How deeply are we in arrears! Unnumbered benefits we have received from God, but what returns have we made? It is said of Hezekiah, "that he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him:" and his conduct we have all too successfully imitated. Our time has been wasted,—our talents prostituted,—our hearts set on idols.—The members of our bodies have been instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; and the powers of our souls have been darkened and degraded; and God and his benefits forgotten.

3. *Debts place their subjects in circumstances of embarrassment and danger.* How wretched is the man who is deeply in debt! Wherever he turns, he is sure to meet a creditor, who harasses and torments him for sums which he is totally unable to discharge. He lives every day under the expectation of an arrest, and calculates upon nothing but confinement in a jail. How descriptive is this of the state of sinners who are deeply in debt to God! who have made no returns of gratitude, love, nor obedience to their Maker! who are tormented with fearful apprehensions! liable to an arrest from Divine Justice, and in danger of being cast into the prison of hell.

II. OUR DEBTS MAY BE FORGIVEN.

1. *When we ask forgiveness for our debts, it supposes that we have no hope of discharging them.* We cannot pay them off:

the immense and incalculable value of the benefits received, leaves no possibility of our making adequate returns for them: if God had never done any thing for us, but that of giving his Son to die for our sins, this would have laid us under such a mighty debt of obligation, that an eternity of gratitude would have failed to discharge the amazing sum; but he has given us his Spirit, his gospel, his ordinances, and his ministers. 'Oh to grace what mighty debtors!' We cannot pay off our debts; they have been so long standing, accumulating, and increasing. Most of all, we have nothing to pay, we are insolvent debtors.

2. *When we ask forgiveness, it implies that our future obedience can never atone for our past defects.* If we had contracted a debt, our payment for goods in future would not discharge the old debt; we can never go beyond the requirements of the law; "Therefore by the deeds of the law," &c, Rom. iii, 20. But our debts may be forgiven. We infer this,—*First, from the character of God as revealed by himself.* He proclaimed his name to Moses; "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity," &c, Exod. xxxiv, 6, 7. "He is ready to pardon," Neh. ix, 7. "Ready to forgive," Psa. lxxxvi, 5. "To him belong mercies and forgivenesses," &c, Dan. ix, 9. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out," &c, Isa. xliii, 25.—*Secondly, from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.* That the sufferings of the Redeemer were sufferings for our sins, is a fact which the inspired writers most clearly demonstrate. "He was wounded for our transgressions," &c, Isa. liii, 5. "He hath made him to be sin for us," &c, 2 Cor. v, 21. "Christ was once offered," &c, Heb. ix, 28. "Who his own self bare our sins," &c, 1 Peter ii, 24. And the atonement of Christ for sin is the foundation of our hope of pardon. Hence remission of sins is preached in his name, Luke xxiv, 47; Acts xiii, 38, 39. And "God forgives men for Christ's sake," Ephes. iv, 32.—*Thirdly, from the promises of the Bible.* "Come now and let us reason together," &c, Isa. i, 18. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c, lv, 7. "All manner of sin and blasphemy," &c, Matt. xii, 31.—*Fourthly, from the testimonies of the saints.* Moses said to God, "Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now," Num. xiv, 19. "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity," Psa. lxxviii, 38. David said, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin," Psa. xxxii, 5. Hezekiah declared, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back," Isa. xxxviii, 17. "We have redemption through his blood, even the

forgiveness of sins," Colos. i, 14. And if any other evidence be deemed necessary, to prove that our debts may be forgiven, the prayer in the text is sufficient. Christ has taught us to ask forgiveness; and what we are directed to ask, we may confidently hope to receive. But to whom is this forgiveness administered? To penitent believers; 'He,' (God) 'pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.' Repentance prepares the mind for the reception of pardon; and induces the sinner humbly and importunately to plead for it, Acts viii, 22. Faith enables him to claim the promises of forgiveness as his own, Acts xiii, 39.

III. THAT IT IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT AND DESIRABLE FOR US TO OBTAIN FORGIVENESS. Two things will serve to confirm the truth of this observation.

1. *A state of forgiveness is a state of positive enjoyment: Enjoyment*, arising from a consciousness of having escaped punishment; an unpardoned sinner is in danger of perdition; he is a child of wrath; God is angry with him, and punishment is threatened him; but when God forgives him, that wrath which was revealed from heaven against him is removed; and he has the knowledge of salvation, &c, Luke i, 77. *Enjoyment*, flowing from the peace of God which passeth all understanding. "For being justified by faith," &c, Rom. v, 1. *Enjoyment*, springing from the testimony of a good conscience, 2 Cor. i, 12. And how highly desirable is that state, which gives birth to enjoyments so divine, so rational, so pure, and so permanent!

2. *A state of forgiveness is a state of absolute security.* What has that man to fear, against whom Heaven has no accusation? "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" A man who has obtained forgiveness from his God, may look every enemy in the face.—With his conscience he is at peace;—God will bruise Satan under his feet;—death will be to him a vanquished foe;—and heaven is his by title and by promise, Rom. viii, 17; 1 John ii, 25. Contemplating such privileges,—who can help exclaiming, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

INFERENCES.

1. *If sins are debts, we cannot fail to recollect how awfully we are in arrears.* Let us make up our accounts, and as far as we can, form an estimate, ascertain how much we owe to God:

Some of us are old and gray headed! Oh what a debt is ours! How much have we received, but how little paid?

2. *Oh how promptly and earnestly should we sue for pardon.* Forgiveness is now offered, but if we delay to accept the generous offer, our great Creditor will issue an arrest against us, and we shall be cast into prison, and be confined in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day.

3. *Has God forgiven your debts?* Cease not to reflect on the returns which duty binds you to make.—*Be grateful*, "Bless the LORD, O my soul," &c, Psa. ciii, 2, 3. *Cultivate a spirit of forgiveness towards others*, Matt. xviii, 23—35. *Let your love to God bear some proportion to the greatness of the obligations you are under to him.* "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors," &c, "and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both; which of them will love him most?" Luke vii, 42.

BETA.

XXVIII.—*Christ the Physician of Souls.*

MATTHEW ix, 12.

"But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

THOUGH Jesus Christ came into the world as the friend and Saviour of sinners; yet he was in general rejected as an impostor, and deceiver of the people. The Jews having expected that he would appear as a temporal and victorious conqueror, despised his humble manifestation in "the form of a servant," and sought to put him to death, because he claimed the character of the Messiah. They regarded his doctrines as blasphemy, attributed his miracles to diabolical agency, and were greatly offended at his familiarity with publicans and sinners. And hence we learn from the preceding context, that Jesus having called Matthew to follow him, he promptly obeyed the Divine command, and gladly entertained the Saviour as a guest at his house. But having most probably invited some of his former associates in sin to partake of his feast, for the benefit of the Redeemer's discourse, the fastidious Pharisees were highly indignant, and "said to the disciples, Why eateth your Master

with publicans and sinners?" But when Jesus heard that, "he said unto them," by way of vindication of his own character and conduct, and for the reprehension and conviction of the censorious Pharisees, "They that be whole," &c. This is supposed to have been a well known proverb among the Jews, which the Divine Teacher *spiritually* applies with peculiar propriety, for the instruction of his hearers; and according to this sacred application of the words, they strikingly suggest, the nature and influence of sin,—the character and office of Christ,—and the subjects and attainments of grace. Observe,

I. THE NATURE AND INFLUENCE OF SIN. The Scriptures describe the exceeding sinfulness of sin, by every figure calculated to excite our abhorrence, and alarm our fears. And as the effects of sin on the *soul* greatly resemble the effects of disease on the *body*, it is frequently represented under this significant emblem. This is certainly the case in the text, in which the diseased state of the soul is evidently intended, by "they that are sick." The nature of this disease is truly deplorable, and replete with imminent danger.

1. *Sin is a moral disease.* It deeply affects mankind as moral and responsible creatures. It has totally destroyed original purity and happiness; filled the world with disorder, misery, and death. It has spread its poisonous infection through every faculty of the soul, and passion of the mind. The understanding is blinded,—the will is perverted,—the conscience is defiled,—and the affections are alienated from God, Eph. iv, 18. Not only is our moral constitution fatally diseased, but utterly ruined; and there is neither spiritual life nor health in us. "Wo unto us, that we have sinned! The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint."

2. *Sin is a universal disease.* It has mortally wounded every power, both of body and soul; and disseminated its infectious influence through the whole mass of mankind. It is the natural state of every human being, Psa. li, 5. It equally affects all ranks of men, and every distinct class of character. It universally prevails in every nation, and successively extends through every period of the world. Its desolating effects reach through all gradations of society, from the greatest monarch to the meanest subject; from the imperial palace to the plebeian cottage. There is no exception, for all have sinned; and sin infects the soul with every species of spiritual malady, and baneful influence, Isa. i, 6.

3. *Sin is a mortal disease.* It brings death and all our wo.

It brings temporal death to the body, and renders all men subject to pain and dissolution, Rom. v, 15.—It brings spiritual death to the soul, and separates between God and his creatures, Eph. ii, 1—3. It also brings eternal death both to body and soul, in "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death," Rom. vi, 23. How dreadful then is the disease of sin! It is the *original cause* of all suffering and sorrow here, and of utter ruin and endless misery hereafter. But though the moral plague of human nature is so malignant, pestilential, and destructive, it is not desperate and irremediable. A perfect cure is obtained through the Saviour of sinners, who was "wounded for our transgressions," and by "whose stripes we are healed." Let us then consider,

II. THE CHARACTER AND OFFICE OF CHRIST. He represented himself in the text as a Divine *Physician*. And in this capacity, as well as in all others, he possesses every possible qualification, suited to all the diversified circumstances, and adequate to the innumerable necessities of mankind.

1. *He is an accessible Physician.* All are invited to come unto him, "without money, and without price." Other physicians are in many cases difficult of access; but whether rich or poor, all are welcome to come to Christ. He will never repulse the sin-sick penitents, but receive them graciously and love them freely, John vi, 37. In the days of his flesh, he went about doing good, and healing all manner of diseases; and he is still present with us by his *word* and *Spirit*, to heal the maladies of our souls, Matt. xviii, 20; Rom. x, 6—9.

2. *He is an infallible Physician.* His infinite wisdom cannot err, nor can his omnipotent power fail of success. The most skilful of human physicians are imperfect and fallible, and though they frequently administer temporary relief, their wisdom is often baffled, nor can they possibly preserve from ultimate death. But the Sovereign Physician of souls possesses an unbounded plenitude of "grace and truth," and can heal the most inveterate diseases of mankind, and fully redeem his people from all their iniquities. He is a *perfect*, a *present*, and an *everlasting* Saviour, Col. i, 19; Heb. vii, 25. With Him no case is difficult, nor disease incurable. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

3. *He is an unchangeable Physician.* In all ages his name has been "like ointment poured forth," to the "weary and heavy laden." When he assumed humanity, he gave sight to the blind,—cleansed the lepers,—healed the sick,—raised the

dead,—bound up the broken-hearted,—and comforted the distressed, Matt. xi, 5; Luke vi, 17—19. And though he ascended to heaven, he is still the gracious Benefactor and Saviour of sinners.—All other physicians are mortal and perishing, but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever." The healing virtue of his name is *undiminished*, and the cleansing efficacy of his blood is *immutable*.

4. *He is the only appointed Physician.* All other helps are insufficient, and other remedies ineffectual; "for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," Nor is any other Saviour necessary, for Jesus is all-sufficient, and his saving abilities are commensurate to the moral wants of the whole world. I thank God, "there is balm in Gilead, there is a Physician there," who can perfectly heal the most *protracted* and *obstinate* disorders of the soul. Unto whom then should we go, but unto Him who can save to the uttermost? and to direct and encourage our application unto him, we shall proceed to notice,

III. THE SUBJECTS AND ATTAINMENTS OF GRACE. "They that be whole," &c. This is a self-evident position, and is intended to illustrate the penitent's character, and method of coming to Christ for salvation. It evidently suggests,

1. *We must deeply feel our spiritual maladies.* Self-ignorance is a deadly and delusive disease of the mind. Under its pernicious influence, we form the most erroneous estimates of our real state and character; which generally operate as effectual barriers to the reception of Christ. We suppose that we are *comparatively* whole and good, and therefore "trust in ourselves that we are righteous;" and consequently reject the only remedy of sovereign grace. Such was manifestly the deluded state of the ancient Pharisees, and the lukewarm Laodiceans; and such is still the infatuated state of all impenitent sinners and nominal Christians, Luke xviii, 9; 2 Cor. iv, 3, 4; Rev. iii, 17. —But when the Holy Spirit convinceth us of our ignorance, guilt, depravity, and wretchedness, we become deeply conscious of the plague of our hearts, and anxiously inquire, what we shall do to be saved, Acts ii, 37, xvi, 30, 31.

2. *We must sincerely renounce our sins.* The habits of impiety greatly aggravate and augment the contagious distempers of our moral nature. It is therefore absolutely necessary, not only to be convinced of our sinful state, but we must also unfeignedly repent, and utterly forsake all our iniquities, Isa. lv, 7; Acts iii, 19. And being truly sensible of our dangerously infected

and perishing condition through sin, we shall earnestly desire and seek an immediate deliverance from the pestilence of moral evil, and a participation of pardoning mercy and regenerating grace, Luke xviii, 13. For this purpose, and in this contrite state of mind,

3. *We must personally apply to the Physician of souls.* This is a duty universally enjoined, and essentially connected with the attainment of salvation. As no advantage can possibly be derived from any remedy, however excellent, unless it be actually applied, neither can we obtain an interest in Christ's saving benefits, except by a personal application unto him, in the appointed means of grace, John v, 40. We should come to the heavenly Physician penitently—believingly—importunately—immediately—and perseveringly, Matt. xi, 28; Isa. xlv, 22; 2 Cor. vi, 2. In thus coming to the Saviour, he will heal our backslidings,—restore us to spiritual health,—grant us perfect soundness of mind,—and ultimately crown us with immortality and eternal life. We may learn from this subject, the need we have of Christ,—the reason why he is rejected,—the sufficiency of his grace, and the efficacy of his healing power. May we embrace this truth, and rejoice in his salvation.

ETA.

XXIX.—*The Ascension of Christ.*

MARK xvi, 9.

"So then after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

THE life of Christ was the most extraordinary and eventful life, that was ever led upon earth: a life anticipated by saints—pourtrayed by prophets—prefigured by types, and in the fulness of time exhibited to the world. Every circumstance, therefore, that was disclosed in a life which was eminently designed to be the pattern and the price of ours, excites a peculiarity of interest, which admits of no comparison; and if any event in such a life merits more than usual attention, it is unquestionably that which closed the impressive scene, and terminated the Saviour's mortal pilgrimage. We cannot contemplate the characters of men

who have benefitted the world by the splendour of their talents, or the lustre of their lives, without feeling a spirit of inquisitive solicitude, to know how they finished their course, parted with their friends, and made their exit. We labour to catch the last glance of departing worth; and sigh to think that an impenetrable veil is thrown over that world of spirits to which we are rapidly tending. The text directs our thoughts to the ascension of our Saviour, a scene which cannot fail to excite our attention: we have here,

I. THE PERIOD WHEN CHRIST ASCENDED—"After the Lord had spoken," &c.

II. THE MANNER—"He was received up into heaven."

III. HIS SUBSEQUENT SITUATION—"And sat on the right hand of God."

I. THE PERIOD WHEN CHRIST ASCENDED—"After the Lord had spoken to them." The substance of this speech is related in the preceding verses: Christ had *reproved*, *directed*, and *comforted* his disciples.

1. *He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart.* Unbelief involves us in moral blame, and merits the reprehension of him who judgeth righteously. It supposes facts that deserve credit,—evidences to support them,—and disregard to those evidences. The fact here was the resurrection of Christ; a fact of the highest importance, "For if Christ be not risen, preaching is vain, and faith is vain, and the apostles were false witnesses of God," 1 Cor. xv, 14, 15. *This fact was supported by evidence.* Christ had previously intimated it, Mark ix, 9; John ii, 19—22. Mary Magdalene had seen him, Mark xvi, 9—11. He had also appeared unto two of his disciples, who had told it unto the residue, v, 13. *These witnesses deserved credit*, as they were competent to judge of what they had seen and heard; and it was not probable that they would seek to deceive others by a false testimony.—*But this fact was discredited.* Here we may see the nature of unbelief generally. Truths of the most important character are presented to us,—evidences of the most indisputable kind are afforded, but unbelief refuses to admit these evidences. Christ also upbraided his disciples *with hardness of heart;* this not unfrequently gives birth to unbelief. Faith refers as much to the disposition of the heart, as to the assent of the understanding; and where the heart is hard and unfeeling, the importance of Divine truth will be unperceived, and its evidences unexamined.

2. *He said unto them, "Go ye into all the world,"* &c. *This*

was the direction which he gave his disciples. The work assigned them was, "Preach the gospel;" not false doctrines, not human opinions, nor Jewish ceremonies. The sphere of their operation was, "all the world;" and their commission was "to every creature." Hence we infer, that the gospel is suited to the circumstances of all—designed for the benefit of all—and that the ministers of truth should aim at preaching it to all.

3. *Christ also comforted his disciples, by the promise of a miraculous influence, with which they should be invested.* "These signs shall follow," &c. "In my name shall they cast out devils." Devils had previously been subject to them, Luke x, 17; and according to the primitive fathers, the power of casting out devils was continued in the church for many years. —"They shall speak with new tongues:" this promise was remarkably fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii, 4—12. —"They shall take up serpents," Acts xxviii, 5;—"If they drink any deadly thing," either by accident or compulsion, "it shall not hurt them." "They shall lay hands on the sick," &c, James v, 14, 15. Such was the *reproof*, *direction*, and *encouragement* which Christ administered to his disciples, previously to his ascension; let us notice,

II. THE MANNER. "He was received," &c.

1. *The ascension of Christ was accomplished by his own eternal power.* "Thou hast ascended on high," &c, Psa. lxviii, 18; —"When he ascended up on high," &c, Eph. iv, 8;—"They looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up," &c, Acts i, 10. The acts of redemption were Christ's personal acts;—at his death he laid down his life for us, no man took it from him;— his resurrection was effected by his own infinite energy;— "Christ died, and rose again," &c, Rom. xiv, 9;—and at his ascension, "he went up to heaven," not in appearance only, but really and locally.

2. *The ascension of Christ was publicly witnessed by his disciples.* "While he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven," &c, Luke xxiv, 51;—"While they beheld he was taken up," &c. Acts i, 9;—he had previously told them, "It is expedient for you that I go away," &c, John xvi, 7. And during the forty days that he continued with them after his resurrection, when he was seen of five hundred brethren at once, and when he spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, it is highly probable that he had prepared their minds for the solemn scene which they were about to witness;

for they were so far from being disappointed, or even sorrowful, at his removal from them, that they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy," Luke xxiv, 52.

3. *The ascension of Christ was hailed with transport by ministering angels.* That David spoke of the ascension of Christ in Psa. lxviii, 17, 18, is clearly proved by comparing it with Eph. iv, 8;—and there the Psalmist declares, "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them," &c. Does not the whole passage refer to a military triumph, where the conqueror returns victoriously from the field of battle, amid the shouts and plaudits of the inhabitants, who come forth to hail him welcome to his native place? Psa. xxiv, 7, 8, xlvii, 5, 6. That angels felt a deep interest in what Christ did upon earth, is most incontestably proved from Luke ii, 13; Matt. iv, 11; Luke xxii, 43; Matt. xxviii, 2; Acts i, 10. And having announced the birth of Christ,—ministered to him in the wilderness,—strengthened him in his agony,—attended him at his resurrection,—did not,

> 'Cherubic legions guard him home,
> And shout him welcome to the skies?'

"He was received up into heaven." Who received him? Did not angels, principalities, and powers? Did not the spirits of just men made perfect receive him into that exalted state of felicity? St. Luke declares "a cloud received him;"—but who can tell what amazing scenes were unfolded beyond that cloud?

III. HIS SUBSEQUENT SITUATION. "He sat on the right hand of God." This is a figurative phrase; and by it we understand,

1. *The honour and dignity to which our Saviour is exalted.* When monarchs elevate their favourites to sit at their right hand, it is considered as the highest point of distinction, 1 Kings ii, 19; Psa. xlv, 9. The dignity to which Christ's human nature is raised is inconceivably glorious, especially when contrasted with that state of shame and degradation to which he voluntarily submitted;—how admirably is this illustrated by the apostle; Phil. ii, 6—11.

2. *The rule and government with which he is invested,* Thus St. Paul declares, God hath "set him at his own right hand," &c. "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church," Eph. i, 20—22;—"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand, John iii, 35, v, 27. The government of the world and the church

is in the hands of Christ; and he is set at the right hand of God, to carry on his mediatorial work,—"There he makes intercession for us," Rom. viii, 34;—"There he dispenses his favours," Eph. iv, 8, 11, 12;—"There he receives our prayers," Rev. v, 8.

3. *The tranquillity and happiness of which he is possessed.* He had been a man of sorrows; he had been stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; his soul had been put to grief, and wrung with unutterable anguish. For the joy that was set before him, "He had endured the cross," &c;—but he is now set down at the right hand of God;—this is a situation of exquisite pleasure, Psa. xvi, 11;—there he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied;—and there are ascribed to him, "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom," &c, Rev. vii, 12. From this subject we learn,

1. *Christ finished the work which he came upon earth to accomplish.* He made an atonement for sin,—left us an example,—raised up apostles, gave them ample instruction,—established a new dispensation,—promised the gift of the Holy Ghost, &c.

2. *Christ has highly honoured human nature.* That body which was wounded, bruised and scourged upon earth, is now seated at the right hand of God.

3. *Christ is exalted for our sake.* "To appear in the presence of God," &c, Heb. ix, 24;—this should give us confidence in our prayers,—excite our emulation,—and, above all, inspire our hopes. Our forerunner is already entered, the first fruits are gathered in,—and "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne," &c, Rev. iii, 21.

BETA.

XXX.—*The grateful Convert.*

LUKE vii, 41—43.

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both," &c.

THE words before us contain a parable, which was spoken by our Lord, on a particular occasion, for the purpose of conveying certain truths, which are very highly *important*, and generally *interesting*. That we may be profited by what is thus written for our instruction, let us consider,—The incident which occasioned this parable,—the parable itself,—and our Lord's application of it.

I. THE INCIDENT WHICH OCCASIONED THIS PARABLE. What information is requisite to show us the occasion of this parable, we find amply detailed in the preceding verses, (verse 36, &c.) Here, for the illustration of our subject, let us particularly observe,

1. *The anointing thus recorded.* This is necessary to be noticed, because some have confounded it with that anointing which is mentioned in Matt. xxvi, Mark xiv, and John xii. But they cannot be the same; for this anointing took place about *two years* before our Lord's death, but that occurred only a *few days* before; *this* took place in a city, probably *Capernaum;* but *that* in the town of *Bethany;*—here our Lord's *feet* were anointed, there his *head* only was anointed;—here it was *Simon* who murmured through *superstition*, there *Judas* through *avarice.* The times, places, and circumstances were all different. Let us observe,

2. *The woman thus mentioned.* It is requisite to consider who and what she was, because two things have been assumed respecting her without sufficient evidence. It has been generally assumed,—*First*, *That she had been a lewd and infamous character*, because it is here said she was a sinner. But the term "sinner" by no means proves this; for the publican confessed himself a sinner, Luke xviii, 13;—and the Jews called Jesus a sinner, John ix, 24;—but in neither case does the term imply lewdness. It is probable that she was a Gentile; as all Gentiles were called "sinners" by the Jews, Gal. ii, 15;—and the touch of a Gentile was considered defiling, especially by the Pharisees, Isa. lxv, 5. It has been assumed,—*Secondly*, *That she was the same with Mary Magdalene*, or Mary of Magdala: this is presumed merely because Mary is mentioned in the next chapter. Thus, without the least proof or shadow of truth, Mary Magdalene, one of the most honourable women that ever adorned the Christian profession, has had her name branded with infamy, in almost all ages and places. In fact, it appears that this woman was not a harlot; nor is it by any means certain that she was the same with Mary Magdalene. Most probably she was a person of Gentile extraction; one who had been converted and pardoned by Christ, and was now become a true and grateful disciple of his; a subject of divine grace, and a sincere lover of Jesus Christ. Let us observe,

3. *The manner in which the Jews sat at meat.* It appears that they sat, or rather inclined on their left side, on narrow beds or couches, which were placed around their tables, where the repast

was spread. Our Lord thus sitting or reclining at Simon's table, it became quite convenient for this good woman to pay him that respect which is here described. In these expressions of respect, we behold a fine example of deep humility,—ardent affection,—and grateful sacrifice. *Of deep humility:* As Christ's devoted servant, she came behind him, and waited on him, it seems in a kneeling posture. *Of ardent affection:* This she evinced by her tears and kisses. *Of grateful sacrifice:* her *property* was devoted to Christ, for with her ointment she anointed his feet:—her *person* was consecrated to him; for her feet, her hands, her eyes, her ears, her lips, and her tresses were all cheerfully employed in his service. Let us observe,

4. *The presumptions which led Simon to his surmisings respecting Christ.* He *presumed* that *a prophet must know all things:* this was evidently a mistake; witness the case of Elisha, 2 Kings iv, 27, and Elijah, 1 Kings xix, 14, 18;—he also presumed that *the touch of a Gentile was defiling*, as above mentioned. Hence he *inferred*, that *Jesus could not be a prophet;* because he did not *know* what he conceived a prophet ought to know,—or he was not so exactly *scrupulous* as he thought a prophet ought to be. This evil surmising required prompt refutation, and leads us to consider,

II. THE PARABLE ITSELF AS HERE RECORDED: "There was a certain creditor," &c. This parable is highly instructive, as it teaches us,

1. *That sins against God are justly denominated "debts;"* because they imply a *withholding* from *God* what is *due* to him, Dan. v, 23;—and they render us *liable* to be cast into the *prison* of hell, Psa. ix, 17; Matt. v, 25, 26.

2. *That all mankind are debtors to God, but in different degrees.* God testifies that all mankind are *sinners*, Psa. xiv, 2, 3; Rom. iii, 23. The *degrees* of sin must depend on *various circumstances.* Those who sin against the clearest light,—who sin amid the enjoyment of God's most distinguishing favours,—whose sins prove most highly injurious to others,—and who commit the most numerous acts of sin,—must be the greatest debtors to God. Hence some are represented as owing *fifty pence*—some *five hundred pence*—and some even *ten thousand talents*, Matt. xviii, 24. But *all* are debtors to God in some degree; for all have withheld what is due to him.

3. *That no debtor to God is capable of paying the debt he owes.* He has nothing to pay;—he has nothing good, but what he must have *derived* from God, James i, 17; he has nothing by which

God can be *profited*, Job xxii, 2; Psa. xvi, 2. Consequently, he has nothing by which he can make *atonement* for past transgressions, or merit God's favours, Psa. cxliii, 2; Rom. iii, 20; Luke xvii, 10.

4. *That the forgiveness of our sins or debts is of the utmost importance to us.* For *imprisonment* in hell can be avoided only by *forgiveness*, Matt. xviii, 29, 30;—we must be *forgiven* here, or we cannot be *entitled* to heaven, Tit. iii, 7.

5. *That a consciousness of insolvency must precede forgiveness.* "When they had nothing," &c. To obtain forgiveness we must *trust in Christ* as our Saviour, Rom. iv, 5;—and no one will trust in Christ, till he is convinced of his own *demerit*, Gal. iii, 23.

6. *And that forgiveness may be confidently expected, when sought on God's terms.* Seek it *like* this woman, at the feet of Jesus; with contrition, affiance, and restless desire:—Then expect such forgiveness as that here mentioned, full, free, and certified, Isa. lv, 6, 7;—expect it, because of God's *wonted kindness:* "He forgave them both;"—and he abounds in such acts of grace, Psa. ciii, 8. For the farther encouragement of all gospel penitents, let us consider,

III. OUR LORD'S APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE. "And he turned," &c, v, 44, &c. Here we find,

1. *Just reproof wisely given;* in which *Simon* was interested. The *evils* reproved in Simon were *various* and *conspicuous:* including—*His unbelief in Christ's mission;* this our Lord reproved by discovering Simon's thoughts: hereby our Lord proved himself indeed more than a prophet.—*His self-esteem;* this was reproved by the woman's superior excellencies.—*His censoriousness;* this was reproved by the propriety of her conduct.—*His want of respect for Christ;* this was reproved by the mention of his defects.—The reproof was given *wisely*, Prov. xxv, 12;—the example here set us, is instructive. Like our Lord we should reprove *courteously*, and please others for their good, Rom. xv, 2;—and we should administer reproof in a *respectful* manner, by engaging our neighbour's judgment, in condemning his error. In this application we find,

2. *Seasonable consolation graciously administered.* In this the *woman* was interested:—"He said unto her, thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." This consolation was both seasonable and kind;—it was *seasonable*, because she was a *sufferer*, through contrition; sympathy with her slighted Saviour; and the tacit reproach of Simon, which he

cherished in his heart, and probably expressed by his looks:—she was a *meek* sufferer; not indulging any resentment towards Simon, nor making any complaint of him to Jesus;—she had learned of Christ, and imitated him, 1 Pet. ii, 23;—she was a meek sufferer in a *righteous* cause; in Christ's service, 1 Peter ii, 50:—and this consolation was *graciously administered*, in rich abundance,—by the justification of her conduct,—the rehearsal of her services,—and the repeated assurances of her Lord's favour. In this application we also find,

3. *Divine instruction kindly suggested.* In this we are *all* interested. The important truths here suggested are,—*That Christ is truly God:* this is evident from his knowledge of Simon's thoughts, and the blessings he now conferred of pardon, salvation, and peace, Mark ii, 7.—*That forgiveness is certain to all gospel believers:* the faith of this woman saved her; and all that believe like her, will be saved like her, Acts xvii, 39.—*That peace may be expected as the effect of forgiveness*, Rom. v, 1.—*That Christ may now be served by us as he was by this woman.* Did she honour Christ by acts of *self-dedication?* So we may honour him by employing our feet in going to his house; our eyes in searching his word, and surveying his works; and our ears in attending to the messages which he sends by his servants. Did she minister to Christ in his *own person?* So we may minister to him in the persons of his beloved *followers;* for as his feet were the members of his natural body, so his faithful servants are the members of his spiritual body. Hence, by our property, our lips, and our tears, we may most acceptably serve him, in them. When you dispense your property in relieving Christ's afflicted servants, then you in effect anoint his feet with precious ointment;—when you comfort the mourners in Zion, by speaking a kind word to them in season, then you affectionately kiss his feet;—and when you sympathize and weep with them that weep, then you wash his feet with your tears.* What you have, cheerfully present to Christ, and he will graciously accept you, according to your ability, Mark xiv, 8.—*That the work of faith in Christ will expose us to reproach*, 1 Tim. iv, 12.—*That those who suffer for Christ* as his *followers*, shall be finally *justified* by him as their *Judge*, Psa. xxxvii, 5, 6; Isaiah xxv, 8;—and *That all grateful labours of love bestowed on Christ*, will be honourably *acknowledged*, and gloriously *rewarded* by him, at the general judgment, Heb. vi, 10; Matt. xxv, 34—40.

ALPHA.

* See Bishop Hall's Contemplations on the subject.

XXXI.—*The barren Fig Tree.*

A NEW YEAR'S SKETCH.

Luke xiii, 6—9.

"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none," &c.

One of the most unpleasant parts of a minister's duty, is to expose the transgressions of his hearers, and to denounce the judgments of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. For notwithstanding most persons love wickedness, and therefore practise it, yet they also wish to stand fair both in their neighbours' estimation and their own; and to be amused with hopes, or, at least, not to be alarmed with fears, respecting the future. Hence they shun the light, lest their deeds should be reproved, because they are not wrought in God, John iii, 19—21.

But how painful soever this duty may be, it is not more disagreeable than necessary. It is necessary for *hearers*, who must be faithfully dealt with, in order to their conviction; must be convinced of what is wrong, that they may reform; and must reform, that they may not perish. And it is no less necessary on the part of the *preacher himself*. His commission is, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear, to publish the whole counsel of God. So the faithful prophets of old declared unto the people *their transgressions and their sins;* so the apostles *warned* every man; and, in like manner, our blessed Redeemer, the faithful and true witness, while he offered abundant mercy to humble and repenting sinners, repeatedly and strongly insisted on the necessity of sinners becoming humble and penitent, that they might escape the punishment their sins deserved. One instance of this, among many that might be adduced, we have in our text and its connections; see the conclusion of the preceding chapter, and verses 1—5 of ch. xiii. The threatenings contained in these verses against the Jews, were awfully verified during the civil wars which followed, and the destruction of their city and temple by the Romans. Yet, however severe their sufferings were, Jesus was not to blame; for he not only forewarned them *explicitly* of the nature and extent of their approaching calamities, if

they continued impenitent, but, in order to impress the subject the more deeply on their minds, "He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree," &c. This parable we now proceed to consider, both, in relation to them, and to ourselves. We accordingly remark,

I. GOD DOES NOT REQUIRE IMPOSSIBILITIES;—does not expect to reap where he has not sown, or to gather what circumstances absolutely and evidently forbid. "A certain man had a fig tree planted,"—not in a *wilderness*, where it was destroyed or injured by prowling beasts; or *on a rock*, where it must wither for lack of moisture; but "in his *vineyard*," where it had all the advantages which situation and culture could afford. This fitly represents the case of the Jewish nation. God had graciously brought their fathers out of Egypt, and, having rebuked kings for their sakes, had planted them in Canaan, "*the glory of all lands*," Ezek. xx, 6; Psa. lxxx, 8, 9. As their *political governor*, he had given them most excellent laws; see Deut. iv, 5—8. As their *protector*, "he rode upon the heavens in their help," &c, Deut. xxxiii, 26, 27. He always *preserved* them while obedient,—and *restored* them to liberty and prosperity when penitent. As their *spiritual governor*, he favoured them with "line upon line," &c. Instance in the calling of Abraham, and the mission of Moses and the prophets. In short, to them pertained the adoption, &c, Rom. ix, 4, 5. And when we consider that "God, who," &c, Heb. i, 1, 2, we must allow that there was just ground for such expostulation and complaint as that in Isa. v, 4;—"What could have been done," &c. From them let us turn to ourselves, and consider our *civil*, and, more especially, our *religious* privileges, as we are favoured with the full blessings of the GOSPEL dispensation. And besides the general advantages of reading and hearing the "better covenant," what other means (such as the influence of good example, the advice of pious friends, the secret strivings of his Spirit, &c,) has not God used, to promote our welfare! Have we attended to the intimations of his will? or do we stand exposed to that threatening in Isa. v, 5, 6;—"And now go to," &c? This resolution apprises us, that although impossibilities are not required, yet,

II. GOD DOES EXPECT RETURNS SUITABLE TO THE ADVANTAGES WE ENJOY;—"He came and sought *fruit* thereon." This truth is confirmed by other passages in the Saviour's teaching. Hear his *reproof* to the Jews; "Whereunto shall I liken this generation?" &c, Matt. xi, 16. Hear his *declara-*

tion; "And that servant which knew his Lord's will," &c, Luke xii, 47, 48. Hear his *denunciations;*—"Then began he to upbraid," &c.—"Wo unto thee, Chorazin!" &c.—"It shall be more tolerable," &c, Matt. xi, 20—24. With these views let us again inquire *concerning ourselves;* whether, privileged as we are with so many gospel blessings, we have brought forth fruit accordingly. Have we brought forth "fruits meet for *repentance;*" or are our grapes "grapes of gall?" Do we bear "the *fruits of righteousness*, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God?" Are we inwardly and outwardly devoted to him, under the influence of that Spirit whose *fruit is* "*love, joy, peace?*" &c, Gal. v, 22, 23. To these questions we should seriously attend: for the text says, that when the proprietor came seeking fruit, and found none, "then said he unto the dresser, Cut it down," &c. "And he answering said, Lord, let it alone this year also," &c. This leads us to observe,

III. SPARING MERCY IS OFTEN EXERCISED IN ANSWER TO INTERCESSION. Moses interceded, and God spared Israel, Exod. xxxii, 7—14. St. James says, "The effectual fervent prayer, &c, availeth much." In the Epistle to the Hebrews, our great High Priest is said to live ever to make intercession for saints: and in our text he seems to be represented as interceding for sinners:—'This nation has been unfruitful under the dispensation of *Moses*, of the *prophets*, and of *John the Baptist*. The present generation has been unfruitful during *three years* of my personal ministry. Yet "let it alone," &c, "till I shall dig about it," &c; till at and after the day of Pentecost my disciples shall proclaim a risen and triumphant Saviour, and "preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," &c.' Thus he pleaded for the Jews. And in other cases, in *your* case,

> 'When Justice bared the sword, to pluck the sinner down,
> The pity of our Lord cried, Let it still alone,' &c.

"If it bear fruit, *well:*"—it will be well for *society*, if the drunkard, the liar, the blasphemer, the injurious man, &c, become temperate, &c; if the unrighteous and covetous become just and liberal, &c. It will be well for *his family*, when he who neglected and corrupted his children, shall bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and well for *himself*, when, in the place of pride, anger, envy, fear, &c, humility, peace, love, hope, &c, possess his heart. "If it bear fruit, well; but if not, *thou shalt cut it down.*" This teaches us, that

IV. DIVINE MERCY AND PATIENCE MAY BE EXHAUSTED. When, in the days of Noah, the earth was full of violence and impiety, the Lord delayed long to execute judgment; yet, at length, "the fountains of the deep were broken up," &c. So the inhabitants of Sodom perished in fiery ruin. Thus also the Israelites, who came out of Egypt, wearied the longsuffering of Jehovah; and he sware in his wrath, "They shall not enter," &c. And thus their descendants, who murdered the prophets, crucified the Lord of life, persecuted his followers, &c, exhausted divine forbearance, and were destroyed, with their city and temple, by the Roman armies. So God spares *individuals*, invites, expostulates, &c, by his providences, his Spirit, his ministers, &c, till their repeated provocations provoke him to seal their endless, their miserable doom. How strikingly, therefore, does this subject speak to the *careless*. How many *years* have you wasted! Vengeance will not always sleep. Your privileges and your responsibility are great. Look at the fate of the antediluvians, of Sodom, of Nineveh, Babylon, Jerusalem, &c, and take warning.

Presumptuous sinners, do you make the forbearance of heaven an encouragement to sin? Jesus has, indeed, interceded, and you have been spared. But *this year* may be your last; yea, the time may be *almost expired*, concerning which he said, "If it bear not fruit, thou shalt cut it down."

Mourning penitents, you are spared, THAT you may be fruitful,—that your fruit may remain,—that you may yet "bear *much* fruit;" and so glorify God, and, finally, be glorified by him.

ZETA.

XXXII—*Lot's Wife.*

LUKE xvii, 32.

"Remember Lot's Wife."

WHEN the pious patriarch Abraham was interceding for the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, one plea which he urged was the equity of the Divine conduct;—"That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, or that the righteous should be as the wicked," Gen. xviii, 25. The truth of this patriarchal plea is exemplified in the chapter before us. The Redeemer of mankind, having announced the dreadful

calamities which were coming upon Jerusalem, proceeded to furnish his disciples with directions how to escape the general ruin, minutely cautioning them against hesitancy and tardiness in their operations, when the specified signs of destruction should appear; and in order to excite them to promptitude, he admonished them, in the concise but impressive passage which we have read as the subject of our present discussion, of a memorable and affecting monument of divine displeasure, recorded in sacred history. As "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," let us endeavour to render this awful example profitable, by proceeding to consider,

I. THE DISTINGUISHED PRIVILEGES OF LOT'S WIFE.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HER TRANSGRESSION.

III. THE NATURE OF HER PUNISHMENT.

I. HER DISTINGUISHED PRIVILEGES. In judging of the turpitude of an action, it is necessary to investigate the situation and privileges of the agent. Had Lot's wife been as destitute, of the means of religious improvement as many of her neighbours, her criminality would have been far less than it was: where much is given, much is required, Matt. xi, 21—23.

1. *She was united by marriage to a truly pious patriarch.* She had been favoured with frequent converse with Abraham, "the friend of God." She had an interest in the prayers of her "righteous" husband; his pious example was continually before her eyes; and doubtless she had often caught sacred wisdom from his lips. These, at that early period, were privileges of no minor character. Yet how inferior and insignificant were her means of religious improvement, compared with those with which many of us have been favoured: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, brethren, sisters, friends, and neighbours, have recommended religion to our acceptance, both by precept and example. What effect has been produced?

2. *She was favoured with the company and converse of celestial visitants*, Gen. xix, 1—3. The messengers of justice to Sodom, and of mercy to her family, took up their abode with her;—what a privilege! Yet great as it was, those with which we are blessed are far superior to it; for since her day, the Jewish prophets have poured, by their sublime predictions, a refulgence of light on the most interesting subjects. Jesus Christ has been "manifested in the flesh," and has "taken away sin by the sacrifice of himself." "Life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel." The Holy Ghost has been poured out in his richest effusions. Christianity has been

published to the world, and has stood every test that Satanic malevolence and human depravity could invent; while countless myriads of witnesses have borne testimony to its truth. We have had our lot cast in a land of vision; and the overtures of mercy have been sounded in our ears from the days of childhood to the present period, Matt. xi, 23, 24.

3. *She was plainly warned of the approaching judgment.* The angels had made the awful import of their errand known, Gen. xix, 12, 13, and had fully pointed out the importance of promptitude in escaping, ver. 16, 17. Whatever calamities may finally overtake the wicked, they are not ignorant of them; for they have been fully described in the sacred Scriptures, in language the most solemn and impressive, Psa. ix, 17; Prov. xiv, 32; Mark xvi, 16. And this annunciation of judgment is specified as the ground of punishment to the disobedient, Prov. i, 24—26, xxix, 1; John iii, 18.

4. *She had seen the judgment of God executed on the wicked,* Gen. xix, 11. She was an eye witness to the sovereign power of Jehovah, and the awful consequence of disobedience. How numerous are the instances of divine displeasure which have been recorded for *our* instruction and preservation;—the deluge of Noah; the overthrow of Sodom and the cities of the plain; the destruction of Pharaoh and his army; the punishment of Korah and his rebellious company; the miraculous overthrow of the Assyrian army; with a vast number of instances, equally striking, connected with Jewish and Christian history.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HER TRANSGRESSION. We may consider the transgression of this unhappy individual as consisting of several parts, or exhibiting various shades.

1. *Inordinate worldly attachment.* There is sufficient reason to believe that Lot possessed a considerable property in Sodom; and its loss may be considered as a punishment inflicted upon him for imprudently, under the influence of secular motives, choosing such an ungodly place for his residence, Gen. xiii, 8—13. It is very probable that his wife's heart was fixed on the substance which they had been obliged to abandon. Her ungodly relatives and acquaintance, whom she had left behind, constituted another object of improper attachment and worldly affection, which swallowed up, or rather superseded, every idea of gratitude for her own mercies. Inordinate affection for sensual objects is still frequently indulged, even by those who profess to be walking in the path of righteousness, 1 John ii, 15.

2. *A yielding to the powerful influence of unbelief.* Notwith-

standing the convincing circumstances of the testimony which she had received, she evidently gave way to doubt on the subject; for had she given the same credence to the voice of mercy which her husband evidently did, she would have had the same stimulus to have urged on her flight from the scene of destruction. Doubting, she lingered and looked back. How common, how powerful, and how destructive is the sin of unbelief! It entombed a generation of Israelites in the wilderness! Heb. iii, 17—19; impeded the miraculous power of the blessed Redeemer! Matt. xiii, 58; involved the descendants of Abraham in a state of judicial blindness, Luke xiii, 34, 35; Rom. xi, 8; consigns man to that "lake of fire, which is the second death," Mark xvi, 16.

3. *The actual violation of a known law.* The positive injunction was, "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain," Gen. xix, 17. The apparent insignificancy of the act prohibited, is no argument for disobedience: an injunction derives its importance, not so much from its nature or consequences, as from the authority and dignity of its author. The commands of God ever ought to be binding, because they proceed from the sovereign, holy, omnipotent, "King of kings." The unhappy individual in question transgressed a commandment with which she was well acquainted; she probably lingered behind her company, and "looked back," and thus involved herself in ruin. How many, alas! are daily, by the commission of evil, and the omission of duty, exposing themselves to the stroke of justice!

III. THE NATURE OF HER PUNISHMENT. The sacred historian asserts, "And she became a pillar of salt;" which may be understood either *literally* or *metaphorically*. If we understand the historian literally, it may be supposed that the transgressor, lingering behind her company, was overtaken by the outskirts of the fiery storm, and became encrusted by nitro-sulphuric matter, which at once extinguished the lamp of life, and fixed her as a monument or pillar of congealed substance, strongly impregnated with saline particles. If we understand the narrative as sustaining a metaphorical character, we consider that, lingering behind, and thus transgressing the Divine command, she fell a victim to the sulphureous tempest; and, as salt has frequently been used as an emblem of duration, and expressive of incorruption, so her awful death is left on record as an imperishable example of the consequence of disobedience. However this might be, her punishment may be considered as,

1. *Sudden in its infliction.* Probably it was an event totally unexpected by her; as she had left the city she considered herself safe. How often have sinners deceived themselves with the idea of security, when destruction has been at their heels!

2. *Consistent with the rules of justice.* She had violated the law of God, and had no reason to expect any thing less than the immediate infliction of the penalty incurred. If sinners have been, and still are spared, it is through the longsuffering of God; the claims of justice are not annulled, it is only the suspension of judgment, 2 Pet. iii, 8, 9.

3. *Cautionary in its design.* Occasional monuments of Divine displeasure have been exhibited in order to alarm the careless sinner, to arouse the lukewarm professor, and to reclaim the wandering backslider, as well as to guard the righteous against unwatchfulness and declension. We learn from this subject, 1. That a relative union with righteous characters will not save from the consequences of sin, Ezek. xviii, 10, 19, 20. 2. The importance of yielding implicit obedience to the commands of God, James ii, 10. 3. That a good beginning does not ensure a happy conclusion. 4. That God will assuredly assert and maintain the claims of his justice.

OMICRON.

XXXIII.—*The Brazen Serpent.*

JOHN iii, 14, 15.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life."

SEEING that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, every part of it must have the same *authority*. Every part of the sacred records does not, however, appear to be in all respects of equal importance. Generally speaking, the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour is, to us, more important than the Old; inasmuch as it *more clearly* displays the mercy of the universal Parent, not towards the Jewish nation only, but towards all his human offspring.

Among the books of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, are, on some accounts, peculiarly valuable;

and especially because they exhibit the most perfect view of the nature and excellence of Christianity, after its developement in the full glory of its dispensation, at the day of Pentecost. But though these documents display our most holy religion more fully than it was consistent with the plans of Infinite Wisdom to do prior to that period, yet we are disposed to listen with equal, if not superior reverence to those discourses of the blessed Redeemer, recorded by the Evangelists, in which he delivers his own message of love, and speaks with a majesty which commands, and with a sweetness which cannot fail to interest the attentive mind.

Whether a fear of the Jews, or a regard to the stillness of the season, and the leisure it afforded, was the inducement to Nicodemus to come to Jesus "*by night*," is not of much consequence to us. He desired instruction; and the Saviour very kindly instructs him, concerning—the nature of his kingdom,—the means of entering into it,—the character of its subjects,—and the circumstances attending its foundation; in reference to which he says, "As Moses lifted up," &c, and thus directs our attention to *the necessity*, the *manner*, and the *end* of his dying for us. Let us therefore consider,

I. THE NECESSITY OF THE SAVIOUR'S DYING. "Even so MUST the Son of man be lifted up." The *lifting up* here mentioned may be explained by what our Lord says elsewhere, chap. viii, 28, and more especially, chap. xii, 32, 33; "signifying what death he should die:"—his being lifted up on the cross, a victim, a curse for the sins of mankind, Gal. iii, 13. The necessity of this appears to have arisen from the perfections of Deity, and the exigencies of man.

1. The *holiness* of God required it. Holiness is that attribute by which God loves what is morally right and good, and disapproves and detests the contrary. Hence his command, to angels and to men, is, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Now men judge, and perhaps the highest of his creatures are obliged to judge of him, partly, by what may be called his conduct, in the moral government of his own universe. It was necessary, therefore, that he should *mark* his abhorrence of that abominable pollution with which man had defiled himself. And accordingly "he hath made *him* to be sin for us, who knew no sin," 2 Cor. v, 21.

2. The *justice* of God required it. It is the province of justice to render to vice and virtue, respectively, their deserts. Sinful man, by his voluntary rejection of his Maker's service, and by

his daring all the consequences of rebellion, is exposed to all that eternal misery for which his depravity makes him meet. And therefore, were he, in his own person, to bear his demerits, he must suffer eternally. Hence Jesus "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii, 24.

3. The *wisdom*, *goodness*, and *mercy* of God required it. On a subject so awful, we would not speculate rashly, nor pronounce dogmatically. Yet, judging from *the fact*, we seem warranted to conclude, that if a *less expensive sacrifice* had been sufficient to satisfy the claims of justice—to express God's holy hatred of sin—to furnish motives to repentance, gratitude, obedience, &c, and thus to open a way for the consistent operation of that mercy which pardons transgression, and that goodness which delights to bless,—then Infinite Wisdom would not have appointed, as our redemption price, "the precious blood of the Son of God."

These remarks have anticipated a part of what might be said relative to the *exigencies of man*. It may be, however, observed, that when we say it was *necessary* that Jesus should die, we speak not of any absolute necessity in the nature of things, but of a necessity on the supposition that man is to be saved from his state of guilt, pollution, and danger.

> 'Die he, or justice must; unless for him
> Some other able, and as willing, pay
> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.'

II. THE MANNER OF THE SAVIOUR'S DYING;—"As Moses *lifted up*, &c,—EVEN SO," &c. If we read Numb. xxi, 4—9, we shall discover that the lifting up of the brazen serpent was,

1. *By Divine appointment.* "And *the Lord* said unto Moses," &c, ver. 8. And "God so loved the world, that *he gave* his only begotten Son," John iii, 16. "HE hath laid on him our iniquities," &c, Isa. liii, 4—6, and Rom. iii, 20—26.

2. *The brazen serpent was lifted up publicly;* in the sight of all the camp of Israel. So "Jesus suffered without the gate, *openly*, Luke xxiii, 27, and 48. It was not possible, indeed, that all the world should witness this sight. But the Redeemer commands that the fact be made as public as possible;—"Preach the gospel to *every creature*." And accordingly he is still "evidently set forth" by his ambassadors; "teaching every man," &c, Col. i, 28.

3. *The brazen serpent was lifted up by way of remedy;*—as a cure for a *deadly disease*, ver. 6 and 8. Jesus is the cure of the malady of sin; whose venom would work spiritual and eternal

death. This death he prevents, John xi, 25, 26. And he is the means of both *the increase* and *the perpetuity* of that life which is its opposite; see John x, 10, and Rom. vi, 23. Wherefore the parallel still holds, when we observe, that,

4. *The serpent lifted up in the wilderness was a sufficient remedy.* "If a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, *he lived.*" For Christ's sake God forgives us *all* trespasses, Col. ii, 13. Believers are also "*quickened* together with him." He *liveth* in them, and hence they "live by faith," and "walk in newness of life," Gal. ii, 20; Rom. vi, 4. And "he is able also to save them *to the uttermost*," Heb. vii, 25.

5. *Moses lifted up the serpent as an only remedy.* God had appointed no other. So likewise Jesus is the only "Mediator between God and man." Except by him "no man cometh unto the Father." Neither is there salvation *in any other*, Acts iv, 10—12; Heb. x, 26.

6. *The brazen serpent was lifted up as a common remedy:*—"And it shall come to pass, that *every one* that is bitten,"—in *whatever part of the camp*, or of whatever *age* or *condition*—"when he looketh upon it, shall live," Num. xxi, 8. And for the sins of Jews and Gentiles, young and old, rich and poor, &c, Jesus is "the propitiation," 1 Tim. i, 15, and ii, 6; Heb. ii, 9. This leads us to consider,

III. THE END OR INTENTION OF THE SAVIOUR'S DYING.

1. *To save us from the extreme of eternal misery;*—"That whosoever believeth should *not perish.*" The text implies *danger* of *inexpressible* sufferings. If a member of the body perish, it becomes useless, and, perhaps, a source of unceasing pain. But the ruin of nobler natures is proportionably more disastrous. And who can express the calamities of that state in which all the faculties and powers of the soul are become inlets of anguish, or instruments of torture?—in which the understanding embraces afflictive truth—

> 'When truth resisted long is sworn our foe,
> And calls eternity to do her right:'

While memory furnishes a faithful record of an abuse of the mercies, and a disregard of the overtures of heaven, &c; and the affections are either ardently bent on objects which must never be possessed, or exerted in farther rebellion, and thus in making torment more intolerable; and the imagination launches out into the future, and overcharges the passing moment with all the horrors of "wrath *to come;* and accusing conscience justifies all the heaviest afflictions of Almighty vengeance; and,

while the sinner writhes in "*unquenchable fire*," charges him with all the folly and all the guilt of his own perdition!

2. *To procure for us the perfection of eternal happiness.* Man's *natural* state is (not the *disordered* one of sickness and death, but) that of "life" and health. He is capable of, and there is procured for him, and therefore he should aspire after,—an "eternal life" of *intellectual enjoyment;* when his *faculties shall be strengthened*, and when nothing shall *interrupt the light of truth*, 1 Cor. xiii, 9—12:—an "eternal life" of *moral enjoyment;* all the powers of the soul being in order and harmony; and the whole glorified man delightfully engaged in HIS service, "in whose *favour is life*," Psa. xxx, 6; John xvii, 3.

In application, we may dwell on the *instrumental cause* of these great and everlasting effects, the condition of this salvation,—believing:—"that whosoever *believeth*," &c. Illustrate this by the looking of the Israelites to the brazen serpent. Suppose one of them had, from having been long bitten, and from feeling much of the effects of the poison, *despaired* of a cure, and had therefore refused to look at the appointed remedy,—he must have died. Desponding sinner, you may look, and be saved, Isa. xlv, 22; John vi, 37. Or suppose another should *presume*, on the slightness of his disorder, the goodness of his constitution, or some nostrum of his own, and disdain or neglect to look,—he must die. Careless sinner, you must believe or be damned, Mark xvi, 16. Wherefore laying aside every weight of sin, or sloth, or self-righteousness, let us look to the strong for strength; and then run with patience the race set before us, still "*looking unto Jesus*," &c, Heb. xii, 1, 2.

ZETA.

XXXIV.—*God's Design in sending his Son into the World.*

JOHN iii, 17, 18.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."

THE mission of Christ to sinners eminently displays the infinite love of God, and deeply involves the interests of mankind. It is, therefore, a subject with which we should cultivate an intimate acquaintance; and earnestly desire a participation of its personal

benefits. And for this purpose, we should diligently search the Scriptures, which uniformly testify of the Saviour, and distinctly reveal the doctrine of eternal life. And there is not, perhaps, any specific portion of the sacred writings better calculated to promote our *direct* and *complete* "instruction in righteousness," than the peculiarly excellent chapter before us. It contains a comprehensive epitome of the whole economy of human redemption, and explicitly unfolds the only way of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. It inculcates the most important doctrines of Christianity, and illustrates the inestimable blessings and privileges of Divine grace, which God hath promised to them that repent and believe the gospel. In the text, the Redeemer describes the design of his manifestation in the flesh—the character and felicity of his followers—and the unbelief and misery of the impenitent;—"For God sent not his Son," &c. These words distinctly assert,—the Saviour's mission in human nature—the believer's personal interest in his merits—and the sinner's rejection of his saving benefits.

I. THE SAVIOUR'S MISSION IN HUMAN NATURE:—"For God sent," &c. Never was there a more blissful and exhilarating message announced to mankind, than this important and comprehensive declaration. It strikingly exhibits the unutterable benignity of the Deity—gladdens the hosts of heaven—and proclaims "good tidings of great joy to every kindred, tongue, and people," Luke ii, 10—14. It assures us,

1. *The mission of Christ was divine in its origin;*—"*God sent* his Son into the world." The Father of mercies compassionately beheld our lost and miserable state as sinners, and graciously promised, and ultimately gave his only begotten Son, to be the propitiation for our sins, John iv, 9, 10. This glorious scheme of reconciliation originated in infinite love, and was accomplished by omnipotent power, Rom. v, 8—10. Christ was God's chosen and righteous servant; and the appointed Mediator of the new covenant. When he assumed humanity, he was no impostor, as the Jews supposed, but the true Messiah, "of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write." He *voluntarily* undertook the cause of our redemption, and perfectly "finished the work which the Father gave him to do." His astonishing doctrines, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension, fully demonstrate the *divinity* of his person, and the *authenticity* of his Messiahship, ver. 2; Acts ii, 32—36. Thus the Lord loved the world, and delivered up his beloved Son, and laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2. *The mission of Christ was propitious in its design*;—It was not to *condemn*, but to *save* the world. The Jews expected that the Gentile world would be utterly destroyed in the days of the Messiah; but he here corrects their error, and teaches them an opposite doctrine. He came not to *destroy* but to *save* both Jews and Gentiles, ver. 16. "Be astonished, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!" When the Lord sent his Son to visit his rebellious subjects, it was not to *execute wrath*, but to *offer mercy*; not to *punish* the guilty, but to *rescue* them from misery; "not to *condemn* the world, but that the world *through him* might be saved." This assertion evidently imports, the ruined and perishing state of mankind through sin; the infinite love and mercy of God to fallen sinners; and the only way of pardon and peace by Jesus Christ, who is the sovereign *Author*, *Medium*, and *Donor* of present salvation, and eternal life, Luke xix, 10; John xiv, 6; 1 Tim. i, 15. Such was the glorious *design* of the Saviour's mission, and the ultimate end of his mediatorial work; whereby we are "bought with a price, redeemed with his precious blood," and saved from sin and wrath through faith in his name; which will more fully appear, by considering,

II. THE BELIEVER'S PERSONAL INTEREST IN HIS MERITS;—"He that *believeth* on him is *not condemned*." It is of the highest importance to ascertain the appointed method by which we actually participate the inestimable blessings of redemption; and on this subject the Scriptures are perfectly plain, and amply sufficient for the *direction* and *encouragement* of mankind. In the text we are taught,

1. *Faith in Christ is the essential principle of salvation*;—"He that *believeth* on him," &c. It is impossible to be saved by the deeds of the law, for we have all violated its precepts, and are therefore under its curse, Gal. iii, 10. But Jesus Christ having obtained eternal redemption for us, he is exhibited in the gospel as a Saviour divinely appointed, and infinitely qualified to save sinners, Heb. vii, 25. We must, however, believe on him, in order to derive advantage from him; for faith is *essentially* necessary to obtain personal salvation, Mark xvi, 16; Rom. x, 10. It is by the vigorous act of faith, that we *individually apprehend* and *appropriate* the Redeemer's merits, in their justifying and cleansing efficacy; and by which he is "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." We must cordially credit and embrace the gospel of Christ, and implicitly confide in his all-prevailing atonement and intercession, for the attainment of every promised blessing.

The absolute necessity of thus believing in the Saviour's person, works, and offices, is uniformly taught in the Scriptures, as the only possible way of realizing an interest in the unsearchable riches of his grace, and the blissful immunities of his kingdom, Acts xvi, 31; Rom. v, 1, 2; Eph. ii, 8, 9.

2. *Faith in Christ secures the actual possession of salvation;*—"He that *believeth* on him is *not condemned.*" This general *negative* implies an absolute *positive;*—they are truly, freely, and fully "justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Their accumulated guilt is graciously absolved—their consciences are divinely purged and tranquillized—their persons are accepted, and they are adopted into the family of God—and the condemning sentence of the law is mercifully cancelled through the blood of the Lamb; for "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." All the blessings of the gospel are suspended on the exercise of faith, and are promised only to them that believe, Mark i, 15; John iii, 14, 15; Acts x, 43. Present *personal faith* is invariably associated with present *personal salvation;*—"He that hath the Son, hath life; he that believeth on him hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life," ver. 36. The believer is therefore the happy partaker of saving grace, and the legitimate heir of eternal bliss, through faith in the crucified Redeemer, who loved him, and gave himself for him, 1 Pet. i, 8, 9. We must now pass to the remaining part of the text, which regards the enemies of Christ, and specifies, according to the proposed arrangement,

III. THE SINNER'S REJECTION OF HIS SAVING BENEFITS;—"But he that believeth not," &c. We here learn the true cause of the present condemnation, and final destruction of the wicked; which is evidently the unhappy result of their own incorrigible obstinacy and disobedience, in rejecting the only Saviour of the world. Observe,

1. *The conduct of the impenitent is distinctly asserted;*—"He that *believeth not.*" Unbelief is an evil, the most pernicious and destructive. It is the total absence of living faith, accompanied with a hardness of heart, which discredits the truth of God, and impiously refuses submission to the authority of his sceptre, and the energy of his Spirit, Heb. iii, 12, 13. It presumptuously insults his Majesty—blasphemes his perfections—despises his goodness—impeaches his veracity—and "makes him a liar," 1 John v, 10;—it indignantly contemns and insults the Lord

Jesus Christ, and impenitently rejects every blessing and privilege of the gospel, John v, 40;—it is the prevailing and condemning sin of the world, and the prolific principle which produces every species of practical impiety and wickedness, Mark vii, 21—23. The language of the text, therefore, implies both the *mental act* and the *personal influence* of unbelief, as the predominate vice, not only of the openly profane, but also of the nominally religious, and all who do not savingly "believe the record which God hath given of his Son."

2. *The state of the unbeliever is deplorably wretched;*—"He is *condemned already.*" This is truly an appalling, but faithful declaration. Sin is always productive of the most horrid effects and fatal consequences. Impenitent sinners are *already* in a state of condemnation; for they are condemned by the denunciations of the law—the threatenings of the gospel—and frequently by the reproaches of a guilty conscience. Like criminals under the awful sentence of death, waiting for the day of execution, the ungodly, who believe not the gospel of Christ, are reserved for the day of wrath, when they will fully receive the just punishment due to their crimes, 2 Cor. v, 10. Their guilt is manifest and enormous; the sentence of condemnation is gone forth against them, and will ultimately be confirmed by the Judge of quick and dead, on all incorrigible unbelievers, Matt. xxv, 41. How deplorable then is their present state! And how inevitable their "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!"

3. *The cause of the sinner's condemnation is duly assigned;*—"*Because* he hath *not believed*," &c. The wicked perish entirely through their own sin and folly. We shall not be punished because we are *naturally* depraved and helpless, or because salvation is *impossible*, for this would be equally unreasonable and unjust; but *solely* because we impenitently *refuse* to believe "in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." The Lord declares that he hath no pleasure in the death and ruin of the ungodly, but wills their happiness, and graciously waits to have mercy upon them; yet they obstinately *resist* the Holy Ghost, and will not come unto Christ, that they might have life, Ezek. xviii, 3; Isa. xxx, 18; 1 Tim. ii, 4. Their misery is, therefore, by no means attributable to "the God of all grace," but *exclusively* to their own *unbelieving rejection* of the Saviour, and hardened impenitence, Mt. xxiii, 37. This greatly aggravates the criminality of their conduct, and will eternally augment the punishment of all who perish under the glorious gospel of Christ, ver. 19.

This subject should deeply impress our minds with the matchless love of God to sinners—the infinite condescension and mercy of the Saviour—the baneful nature and consequences of unbelief—and the essential necessity and blessedness of believing "to the saving of the soul."

ETA.

XXXV.—*Christ's Concern for his Disciples.*

JOHN xvi, 33.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

THE teaching and advice of those friends in whose judgment and integrity we have reason to confide, are usually received by us with great and deserved deference. But should it happen, that such friends and advisers are about to be separated from us, by distance or by death, so that we must be cut off from the benefit of those counsels which hitherto we have enjoyed; this circumstance would serve to make their parting address peculiarly impressive. In this view the discourse, of which our text is a part, seems entitled to particular regard, as having been addressed by our Lord to his sorrowing disciples on that memorable night in which he was "betrayed into the hands of wicked men," John xiii, 1, and xviii, 1—3. Accordingly, in the text we find, that Jesus refers to the encouraging doctrines he had just delivered; and to the *intention*, *necessity*, and *foundation*, of the encouragement given.

I. THE ENCOURAGING DOCTRINES DELIVERED. "*These things* have I spoken unto you." As this passage has reference to a long discourse, beginning at the 13th chapter; we may select a few of the most prominent and important particulars in our Lord's discourse. But it should be premised, that "these things" were spoken by him in his character of "Mediator between God and man;" in which character he says, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world:" again, "I leave the world and go to the Father," ch. xvi, 28. Now a mediator is one that interposes to reconcile two parties who are at variance; and it is highly desirable, that he should feel an

interest in what concerns both the parties he attempts to reconcile. Jesus shows his suitableness to the office, by teaching,

1. *His union with the Father.* Hear his reply to Philip, ch. xiv, 9, 10, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me;" see also ch. i, 1:—and observe that he affirms, "*All things* that the Father hath, are mine," ch. xvi, 15. Wherefore believers are authorized to hope for all that infinite wisdom can devise, infinite power effect, infinite condescension and love bestow, &c. But "a mediator is not a mediator of one" party only; hence our Lord teaches,

2. *His union with his people.* "I in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you," ch. xiv, 20;—this is represented as a *union of nature*, ch. xv, 5;—as "the vine" is of the same nature with "the branches," so is the "one mediator," "the MAN Christ Jesus," John i, 14; Heb. ii, 14—16; and as "the branches" are of the same nature with "the vine," so those who have believed "with the heart unto righteousness," are partakers of the divine nature, and have "the *spirit* of Christ," and *the mind* which was also in him, 2 Pet. i, 4; Rom. viii, 9; Phil. ii, 5;—this is also a *union of affection*, ch. xv, 9;—of the strength and steadiness of which, his benevolent life and voluntary death are sufficient proofs, ver. 15;—"Greater love hath no man than this," &c. Whence follows,

3. *His provision for his people:* in his having procured for them the *teaching* of "the *Spirit of truth*," ch. xiv, 17, and 26;—and the *indwelling* and *renewing* of the HOLY Spirit, ver. 23;—which are privileges, not peculiar to the apostles, but belonging to Christians in general, Eph. i, 17—19; 1 John ii, 20; 1 Cor. vi, 19; Tit. iii, 5, 6:—as are also the *support* and *consolations* of "*the* COMFORTER," ch. xiv, 16;—the plenitude of *heavenly grace*, ch. xvi, 23, 24;—and the perfection of *heavenly glory*, xiv, 1—3. We notice,

II. THE INTENTION WITH WHICH THESE THINGS WERE SPOKEN;—"That in me ye might have *peace*." By saying "IN ME," the Saviour recals to our attention that he is the medium through which every blessing comes to us. That, for instance,

Through him as our Saviour, *who died for us*, we have "*peace with God.*" In this case peace is the opposite of hostility, condemnation, painful forebodings, &c. With the sinner God is *angry*—his *wrath* abideth on him, Psa. vii, 11; John iii, 36;—but "being justified by faith, we have peace," &c. Rom. v, 1, 2;—so that we may adopt the prophet's language: "O Lord, I will praise thee," &c, Isa. xii, 1, 2.

Through him, as our Saviour, *living in us*, we have *peace with conscience*, and a peaceful exemption from the turbulence of *unholy passions*. In this case peace is opposed to the misgivings of guilt, 2 Cor. i, 12;—the enmity of the carnal mind, Eph. v, 22, 23;—and the anarchy of discordant principles, Matt. xi, 29, 30. This peace may be established, increased, and perpetuated, by considering, that,

Through him, as our Saviour, *reigning for us*, we shall be protected against all enemies and dangers. "He is the head over all things;"—he shall continue to reign, 1 Cor. xv, 25;—and the result of his government will be most glorious, ver. 49—58. In this case peace is the opposite of impatience, distraction, anxiety, &c. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace," Isa. xxvi, 3, 4:—thus the psalmist, Psa. xlvi, 1—3;—and thus the apostle, Rom. viii, 28, 38, 39. How encouraging are these representations, and how needful! Let us consider,

III. THE NECESSITY OF THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN. "*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*"

1. This is the common lot to which man is born, "as the sparks fly upward," Job v, 7. But,

2. The tribulations of the pious are often greatly augmented by the men of the world; whose spirit, conversation, maxims, and example, are all hostile to our prosperity and peace;—and whom,

3. "The prince of this world" *employs* as his instruments of persecution, ver. 32;—or of *seduction*, 2 Tim. vii, 12, 13;—while,

4. "Satan *himself*, *transformed into an angel of light*," will seek to ruin us by temptations to indolence, carnal indulgence, worldly prudence, self-pleasing, &c, if, as the "*adversary, a roaring lion*," he cannot violently and openly destroy. Now when a person yields to temptation, he is carried down its rapid tide with ease, and, perhaps, with pleasure; but when it is *resisted*, it is felt, *painfully felt;* and the "*tribulation*" occasioned is in proportion to the strength of the evil influence exerted, and the resistance opposed. Yet, however painful the opposition, it must be made, and maintained; and perhaps maintained to the end of life. Our text says to the *young* and to the *old*, &c, "In the world *ye shall have* tribulation." There is, however, no room for despondency: "Be of good cheer." In order to which we contemplate,

IV. THE FOUNDATION OF THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN. "*I have overcome the world.*" The Redeemer here represents himself as having joined himself with his believing, obedient

disciples, in a common cause. "Be *ye* of good cheer; for *I have overcome*:"—have overcome

The *frowns* and *threats*, the *pains* and *poverty*, and *troubles of the world*;—"A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" he triumphed over persecution, &c: and held on in the path of duty, and of honour, till he accomplished what he had undertaken, Luke xii, 50. He had overcome

The *smiles and allurements of the world*. His heart was not corrupted by the flattering prospects of royalty, John vi, 15;—nor by the incense of popular applause, Matt. xxi, 8, 9;—but whether the world admired or hated him, he still continued to testify of it, that the works thereof were evil, John vi, 7; and he had also overcome

The *Prince of the world*:—When for forty days he was tempted of him, among other things, to "the lust of the flesh," Luke iv, 2–4;—"the lust of the eyes," ver. 5–8;—"and the pride of life," ver. 9–12;—and when he had, in numerous instances, healed those whom Satan had bound and afflicted, Luke xiii, 16, and x, 17–20;—and through the hour of severest temptation he still overcame "the power of darkness," Luke xxii, 53;—till, finally, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them," Col. ii, 15.

CONCLUSION.

1. The world is still a troublesome and dangerous enemy,—and those who do not overcome it by faith, 1 John v, 4, 5;—and in the strength of Jesus, Phil. iv, 13;—will be eternally undone. Therefore we should march with *patience* and with *caution* in our Captain's footsteps, that we may conquer after his example. But,

2. The world is a foiled enemy;—therefore we may march onward with *confidence* and *hope*, under our Captain's care and orders, ch. xiv, 19. But,

3. To him who has overcome for us, we are under infinite obligations. Let us, therefore, *love*, *honour*, and *obey* him, ch. xiv, 21, and xv, 12, 14.

ZETA.

XXXVI.—*The Manifestation of Christ to his Disciples after his Resurrection.*

JOHN XX, 19, 20.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you," &c.

WHEN Paul preached before king Agrippa, concerning the sufferings of Christ and his resurrection from the dead, he made his appeal for the verity of the facts, to the publicity with which they were attended: "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." Jesus Christ was a public character; what he did was for the benefit of the world; and so far was he from concealing his designs, that he adopted the most successful methods to give notoriety to his acts, and extension to his plans. Multitudes heard his sermons, saw his miracles, witnessed his sufferings, and beheld his death: "And he showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs; being seen of his disciples forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." The text furnishes us with one of these proofs, and suggests several profitable topics for discussion. In it we have,

I. THE APPEARANCE OF CHRIST TO HIS DISCIPLES. "The same day," &c, "where the disciples were assembled, came Jesus and stood in the midst." Here notice,

1. *The disciples were assembled.* Christ's disciples are accustomed to meet together;—*love* leads them to do this; they love one another with pure hearts fervently:—*duty* binds them to come together, "Not forsaking the assembling," &c, Heb. x, 25;—*mutual benefit* excites them to associate with each other; Christ comes among them, Matt. xviii, 20. The world has its assemblies,—pleasure its assemblies,—commerce its assemblies,—and Christ's disciples their assemblies.

2. *This was a select assembly.* Promiscuous companies for the purpose of public and devotional exercises, such as singing, prayer, and preaching, have been sanctioned by the practice of

all ages; but these are not meant to set aside the use of select meetings, assemblies of disciples.

3. *It was private.* "The doors were shut." The peal of slander has long been rung against private meetings, and the vilest scenes have been associated with them; but while we have such an example as this before our eyes, we may bid defiance to the revilings of men: fear of the Jews induced them to shut the doors; they had seen the storm of persecution that fell upon Christ, and fear suggested that a similar fate awaited them. Faith in God is the best antidote to the fear of man, Psa. lvi, 3; —"What time I am afraid," &c.

4. *It was in the evening.* Evenings are favourable for religious assemblies; multitudes are then at leisure, the business of the day is closed, and what can be more proper than to spend an hour, ere we retire to rest, in the worship of God?

5. *It was immediately after our Lord's resurrection.* How solicitous he was to cheer the minds of his disconsolate disciples; five distinct times he appeared to them the same day—a memorable day!—the first day of the week; what St. John calls the Lord's day;—a day which has been kept by Christians to commemorate that extraordinary event, the resurrection of Christ. Though the doors were shut, yet Jesus entered: it is possible he might have done that in the ordinary way, without their observing it; or his entrance might have been miraculous,—"With God all things are possible."

II. THE BENEDICTION HE PRONOUNCED UPON THEM. He "said unto them, Peace be unto you:" this was his usual salutation. His disciples were charged to use a similar address, Luke x, 5;—Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace,—his kingdom is the kingdom of peace,—and his benediction is the blessing of peace. This benediction was designed,

1. *To dissipate their fears.* When Christ once appeared to them in a storm, they were afraid, and thought they saw a Spirit; he then said, "Be of good cheer," &c, Matt. xiv, 27. Similar feelings were most probably excited now, but Jesus said, "Peace be unto you."

2. *To calm their troubled consciences.* The recollection of their cowardly conduct, in deserting their Master in his great extremity, must have been a source of deep anguish to them; and when they saw Christ standing personally before them, it would be natural enough to imagine that he came with a design to upbraid them with their cowardice and crime: but he said, "Peace be unto you."

3. *As the medium of communicating good.* When Christ speaks peace, he communicates peace. When men use terms of commendation, however expressive they may be of their kindness towards us, they are mere words; but the words of Christ are the medium of communicating divine peace to us; "The words that I speak," &c, John vi, 63.

4. *As a prelude to their future success.* Peace among the Hebrews was a term of comprehensive import, including all blessings, temporal and spiritual. When Christ said "Peace be unto you," it was in effect saying—prosperity shall attend you.

III. THE SIGHT HE EXHIBITED TO THEM. "He showed unto them his hands and his side." This served to convince the disciples,

1. *That what they saw was real and not illusive.* The body which they beheld was that identical body which was laid in the sepulchre; and Christ showed unto them his hands and his side, to remove all their doubts. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me," &c, Luke xxiv, 37—40.

2. *To remind them of the love that he bore them, and the sufferings which he had endured for their sakes.* What could be more affecting? He showed unto them his hands—hands that had been transfixed to the cross—hands that still exhibited the prints of the nails; and he showed unto them his side, which had been pierced by the soldier's spear. Who can contemplate this tender and affecting scene, without exclaiming—behold how he loved them! Does the broken soldier exhibit his scars, and the marks of his wounds, to show that he has bled for his country?—so Christ showed his hands and side, to remind his disciples that he had bled for them. With the same body he now appears in the presence of God for us. St. John saw in the midst of the throne a lamb as it had been slain, &c;—and when Christ shall come enthroned in judgment, "every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him," &c, Rev. i, 7.

IV. THE SENSATION THEY FELT ON BEHOLDING HIM. "Then were the disciples glad," &c. This gladness was,

1. *Founded in knowledge.* They knew that it was the Lord who had thus made himself visible to them;—that it was he who had borne their griefs, and carried their sorrows. They *saw* the Lord, they *heard* his voice,—and were favoured with his benediction:—they knew that they were not deceived; they had the demonstration of their senses. The joy which God puts into the hearts of his people now, is of a similar kind; not

arising indeed from the perceptions of sense, but from the evidence of faith,—faith supplies the place of sense, Heb. xi, 1;—"Whom having not seen ye love," &c, 1 Pet. i, 8.

2. *Produced by love.* That the disciples had loved the Lord Jesus, none can doubt,—they had left all to follow him,—they had submitted to his instruction,—and continued with him in his temptation: it is true they had been scattered in a cloudy and dark day; but they were now assembled to converse of him to whom their hearts clung with the fondest attachment; and Jesus came and stood in the midst. Can we be surprised that the disciples were "glad when they saw the Lord?" Gladness is opposed to grief; they had seen the saddest sight that was ever exhibited in the world;—a sight that made the sun to blush, and hide his head beneath the sable mantle of midnight;—a sight that wrung their hearts with unutterable anguish;—but the cause of their grief was removed;—their Lord, who had been torn from them by the cruel hands of a lawless rabble, was now restored to them;—he had been dead, but he was now alive again:—and "they saw the Lord."

3. *Associated with confidence.* The disciples entertained the most exalted ideas of their Master's character, but they had considerable doubts as to the result of his undertaking; and when they saw him expire on the cross, they were almost ready to abandon hope, and sink into despair. He had indeed suggested that he should rise again from the dead, but they did not know what this rising from the dead could mean. But now "they saw the Lord," and their confidence was established: as it would be natural for them to infer, that he who could burst the barriers of the tomb—reanimate his mortal frame—and terrify and disperse the Roman soldiery, *could do* whatsoever he pleased; and that he *would* fulfil all his engagements, and accomplish all his promises.

From the text we have something,

1. *To confirm our faith.* The resurrection of Christ is attested by the most incontrovertible witnesses, who *could not* be deceived themselves, and *would not* deceive others.

2. *To guide our conduct.* Christ met his disciples when assembled; therefore let us frequent the assemblies of the saints.

3. *To excite our expectations.* Christ comes to bless his people; he said "Peace be unto you; and he showed unto them," &c. Let us expect his blessing. Have we been ungrateful, fearful, or unbelieving? So had the disciples, yet

Christ blessed them;—he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;—and he will bless his people with peace.

BETA.

XXXVII.—*Dorcas.*

ACTS ix, 36—42.

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas," &c.

THIS book is very significantly termed "Acts of the Apostles." Had it been a composition that exhibited to view the acts of heroes,—the eloquence of orators,—or the benevolence of philanthropists, it would have excited our attention, and interested our feelings. But in the "Acts of the Apostles," we behold achievements of heroism never surpassed;—powers of eloquence never paralleled;—and deeds of benevolence never rivalled. This book also delineates the characters of Christians of inferior rank, who knew no privileges but what we are called to enjoy; and who obtained no succours but what we may realize. For the encouragement and imitation of the female part of my auditory, we have the examples of honourable women recorded in this interesting portion of sacred history; and among them the subject of our text forms an imperishable pattern of active benevolence. We will consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF DORCAS.

1. *She was a disciple;* that is, a *scholar* or a *pupil.* This supposes that *she had a teacher:* in Christianity the Lord Jesus sustains that office, John iii, 2, iv, 19; Acts iii, 22;—his ministers are authorized also to *teach* in his name, Matt. xxviii, 19, 20. *She had a lesson to learn;* comprehending the doctrines, duties, and privileges of Christianity. *She submitted to be taught.* Here *faith* is necessary; faith in the ability and benevolence of the teacher. *Humility* is necessary; some are too proud to learn. *Diligence* is necessary; our lessons must be understood, remembered, and practised. *Perseverance* is necessary; the most matured Christian must be still a disciple.

2. *This woman was full of good works.* Works, to be de-

servedly denominated good, must flow from a *good principle.* Actions are either good or bad, according to the principles by which they are produced. The love of God is the principle of good works, John xiv, 15—23; Rom. xiii, 10; 1 John v, 3. *Good works are under the direction of legitimate rules.* In religion, there must not only be rectitude of principle, but uniformity of action. Many mean well, and intend to do what is right;—but they miss the mark for want of conforming to rule;—Saul, of Tarsus, thought he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." The Bible is the only rule of right, and good works are in conformity with this rule. *Good works invariably refer to a right end.* "God hath made all things for himself;" and all human actions should be directed to promote his glory, Rom. xiv, 7, 8; Col. iii, 17—23. Dorcas was *full of good works.* This implies that her heart was full of those holy principles and dispositions, which invariably led her to the practice of good works; or that her time was fully employed, and her life occupied in devising and executing plans of public usefulness. The "alms deeds" of Dorcas are also mentioned;—alms are goods given to the poor. It is established by the order of God, that the poor shall never cease out of the land:—people who are in affluent circumstances, are bound by the laws of God to help the poor.—When we have not "goods to feed the poor," we may yet have it in our power to clothe them;—females should never deem it degrading to their characters to assist in furnishing apparel for the poor. Dorcas made "coats and garments" for poor widows.

II. HER SICKNESS AND DEATH. "And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died." When we consider the frailty of the human body,—the innumerable accidents and dangers to which we are daily exposed,—and the hosts of pestilential diseases that wage war with mankind,—it is matter of astonishment that health is so long continued, and death so long delayed. Dorcas *was sick:*—

1. *Afflictions may be regarded as punishments for sin.* This world is not generally the theatre of punishment, 2 Pet. ii, 9;—but God partially punishes some sins upon earth, Psa. lxxxix, 31, 32, cvii, 17.

2. *Afflictions are sometimes preventives from evil,* 2 Cor. xii, 17;—futurity is concealed from us;—the evils to which we are exposed are to us partially unknown; but God sees all that lies before us; and, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that he afflicts his people now, as he afflicted Paul of old.

3. *Afflictions are means of improvement in personal holiness.* Considered in themselves they are evil, but God often overrules them for good, Heb. xii, 10, 11. Hence Christians profit by their afflictions.

4. *Afflictions are preludes to our release from the body.* They are the harbingers of death, and the messengers of mortality. Such were the afflictions of Dorcas; she fell "sick—and died." Death is a debt we must all pay, Rom. v, 12, vi, 23;—death is a power to which we must all submit:—Dorcas was a disciple,—a useful member of society,—she was surrounded by her beloved friends; yet she fell "sick, and died." Oh how vain are all personal endowments, and human efforts, to retard the approach of death!

III. HER RESTORATION TO LIFE.

1. *The body was washed, and laid in an upper chamber.* The custom of washing the dead, has prevailed among most of the civilized nations of the earth; the Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins, paid that mark of respect to the bodies of their relatives. Faith in the doctrine of the resurrection was an additional reason why the primitive Christians did it. The "upper chamber," Dr. Lightfoot thinks, was the public meeting room for the Christians in that town.

2. *They sent for Peter,*—Perhaps to comfort them in their distress. What so consoling in the hour of trouble, as the soothing sympathies of a friend?—Or, to improve the opportunity by his pious counsel, and apostolic advice:—Or, what is not improbable, they might have entertained an expectation that Peter would restore the dead body to life.

3. *Peter obeyed the summons, and returned with the messengers to Joppa.* We have no reason to infer from the history, that he knew why he was sent for.—Our providential path is sometimes strange and unexpected. Ministers should obey the calls of duty, and be the servants of all, for the sake of Him, who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

4. *Peter, when he arrived, found a company of widows weeping, and showing the coats and garments,* &c. To mourn for the pious dead, is rather commendable than censurable. On their account, indeed, we ought not to weep; they have a "better country" than ours,—better society,—better provision,—and a better habitation.

"And can we mourn to see
Our fellow prisoners free?

Free from doubts, and griefs, and fears,
In the haven of the skies;
Can we weep to see the tears
Wiped for ever from their eyes?"

But we weep for ourselves to think that we have lost so many dear companions of our journey—soldiers from our army—members from our body. That so much salt of the earth is removed—so many lights of the world extinguished. The *widows* were *weeping*. Calmet says, Dorcas was a widow. The widows not only wept for her, but commended her, by exhibiting the coats and garments which she had made for them.

5. *Peter put them all forth.* This was done, either to avoid all show and ostentation, or that he might have no interruptions in his prayers. *He kneeled down and prayed.*—Kneeling for prayer has been sanctioned by the pious in all ages. With the subject of Peter's prayer, and the language employed in it, we have no acquaintance. *And turning him to the body;*—it is probable that he turned from the body while he prayed, that the sight of it might not discourage his faith: but having received a Divine intimation that God would raise the dead, he said, "*Tabitha, arise.*" The power of God accompanied the word, and "she opened her eyes," &c.

IV. THE SUBSEQUENT EVENTS THAT TRANSPIRED. Peter "called the saints and widows, and presented her alive." Observe,

1. *The witnesses of this miracle;* Saints and widows, who had previously seen, and mourned over the dead body of Tabitha; but to whom she is now presented alive. Here could be no cheat, nor imposition practised upon them.

2. *The publicity of this miracle.* "It was known throughout all Joppa;" known that Dorcas had been ill,—that she had died,—that Peter had been sent for,—and was now known that she was raised from the dead. It is to the honour of Christianity that it needs no concealment: as its great Author intended it for universal advantage, he has used the most effectual means to give it general publicity, Mark xvi, 15.

3. *The effect produced by this miracle.* Many believed in the Lord: miracles have always been designed to produce faith. Such were the miracles of Moses,—of Christ,—and of the Apostles. Many believed in the Lord; believed that the Lord Jesus was the true Messiah, and depended upon him for salvation.

APPLICATION.

1. *From the character of Dorcas, we observe the amiableness of female piety.* How honourable was her character—how benevolent her actions—how full of good works—how high in estimation by Christians—and how exalted was she in the sight of God.

2. *From the conduct of the widows we perceive the gratitude which all should evince, who are dependant on the bounties of others.* Poor people should be grateful to their benefactors. The ungrateful are neither fit to serve their Maker, their country, nor their friends.

3. *From the example of Peter we learn how promptly we should endeavour to do good:* he made no delay to accompany the messengers who were sent for him.

4. *Finally, we discover from the whole narration, how all things issue in the Divine glory:* for of him,—and through him, and to him,—are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

BETA.

XXXVIII.—*The Case of the Philippian Jailer.*

ACTS xvi, 29—31.

"Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

HAPPINESS, the object of general inquiry and pursuit, depends chiefly on ourselves;—on the suppression of improper dispositions;—and the cultivation of such as are proper and praiseworthy. Among the latter we may reckon gratitude; in order to the promotion of which, we should accustom ourselves to look at the bright side of our affairs; and to reflect often and seriously on the advantages of our situation; more especially on our religious advantages. Not only do we see and hear such things as were, under the Old Testament dispensation, desired in vain by "prophets and righteous men," but our privileges are in some respects superior to those of even the apostles and first disciples of Christ. We have Bibles *printed* for our use, and *offered* on easy terms; and we may publicly

worship God, according to the dictates of our consciences, unmolested; but they, with fewer means of information, had to encounter persecution in various forms, and to meet the brutality of ignorance, the misguided zeal of superstition, and the crooked insinuations of worldly policy. See Paul and Silas insulted by the populace, haled to the magistrates, condemned, scourged, imprisoned, ver. 16—24;—but mark the interposition of Providence, ver. 25—31:—the jailer proposes an important question, and receives a suitable answer.

I. THE IMPORTANT QUESTION PROPOSED: "What must I do to be saved?" That the jailer thought this a matter of the last importance, the whole of his conduct on this occasion testifies. We are not informed of what religion he had previously been: probably he had been a heathen. He knew, however, for what cause Paul and Silas had been imprisoned, namely, for preaching "Jesus and the resurrection;" and, under all the circumstances of the case, his language appeared to be that of *keen conviction*, *anxious solicitude*, *candid inquiry*, and *humble submission*. It was,

1. The language of *keen conviction*. He was convinced that the finger of God was in this case; natural causes might shake the foundations of the prison, and, perhaps, open some of the doors; but that every one's bands should be loosed, indicated supernatural operation. Accordingly, he was convinced that the doctrine was true, on behalf of which such wonders had been wrought; and, consequently, that his former opinions had been erroneous, and his practices sinful. Such is now the case of the awakened sinner;—whether, through the ministry of a *Boanerges*, his soul is shaken by the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai,—or whether his heart, like that of Lydia, is gently opened, and his understanding begins to be illuminated by the milder rays of gospel grace,—he is *convinced* "of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." Hence the question is,

2. The language of *anxious solicitude;*—"*What* must I *do* to be *saved?*" The jailer's apprehensions of spiritual and eternal things were, certainly, at this time very confused: yet he had such views of the holiness and justice of God, and of the turpitude and demerit of sin, as seriously to apprehend *danger*. He "*sprang in*, and came *trembling*," &c. Part of this agitation and distress might have been the effect of terror, naturally occasioned by the earthquake, &c;—but, doubtless, he also felt concerned for his safety in a *future state*. Just as many others, even in our days, are led to exclaim,—

"I tremble, lest the wrath divine,
Which bruises now my wretched soul,
Should bruise this guilty soul of mine,
Long as eternal ages roll."

In such a case the question becomes,

3. The language of *candid inquiry*. The very proposal of it is a tacit *acknowledgment of ignorance*, and a *request for proper information*. Prejudice condemns all who dissent from her *dogmas;* and pride obstinately defends its errors, and justifies or extenuates all its faults: but candour wishes to see things as they really are; and says to God, and to man, "What I know not, teach me." Thus the jailer desired to know the extent of his error, and guilt, and danger; as well as the extent and efficacy of the proposed remedy, and the method of obtaining it—and thus every true penitent wishes to know the worst of his case, Psa. cxxxix, 22, 23;—such a disposition is highly advisable, Psa. xxv, 9; Prov. i, 5;—is highly necessary, Prov. i, 7, and xxviii, 26; James iv, 6. And where it prevails it will induce,

4. The language of *humble submission*. The unhumbled proposes terms of accommodation. 'Such and such things must be spared; this or that indulgence must be granted,' &c. But here he who had lately "*thrust*" Paul and his companion into the inner prison, submits to *any terms;*—"he *fell down* before them, and said, "Sirs, what must I do?"—If the sacrifice of the right hand, or the right eye be required, Matt. v, 29, 30, the sacrifice is made;—the penitent submits to every privation, and is willing to exert himself to the utmost;—he sells all, that he may purchase the pearl of great price, and labours "for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." The question thus amplified is of universal importance: let each of us, therefore, observe,

II. THE SUITABLE ANSWER RETURNED. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" Here we remark in general,—that gospel salvation is not only a deliverance from calamity felt or feared, but also an introduction to positive privileges and enjoyments, to "things that accompany salvation," Heb. vi, 9;—and that *believing* is a work which engages the heart, as well as the understanding and judgment, Acts viii, 37, and xv, 9; Rom. x, 10. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, implies, therefore,

1. *A hearty credence of his history;*—of the history of his supernatural conception—sinless life—miracles—voluntary and

sacrificial death—resurrection—ascension, &c, 1 Cor. xv, 1—8; 1 Tim. iii, 15. This history sufficiently exemplifies both Divine providence and Divine grace; and a cordial belief of it would save—from the dreary gloom of infidelity, and the bewildering doubts and anxiety of skepticism,—into the light of truth, and the possession of interesting facts, on which the mind and heart might delightfully expatiate and dwell. Such belief includes,

2. *A hearty reception of his doctrine;*—concerning the depravity and weakness of human nature—the necessity, and freeness, and sufficiency of grace, &c, John iii, 5; Heb. iv, 16; Phil. iv, 19;—he is "*that Prophet*," whom we are to "hear in all things," &c, Acts iii, 22;—and a cordial belief of his doctrine will save—from ignorance, self-righteousness, &c, on the one hand, and from despondency on the other,—into correct views of our malady, and a cheering prospect of its cure. But this requires, also,

3. *A hearty reliance on his mediation;* both as to atonement. Rom. iii, 21–26;—and to intercession, Heb. vii, 25; 1 John ii, 1. Such reliance saves from guilt, Rom. viii, 1, 34;—from fear of death and hell, Heb. ii, 14, 15;—from slavery, &c, 2 Tim. ii, 26;—into peace, Rom. v, 1;—adoption, Gal. iii, 26, 29; Rom. viii, 17;—liberty, John viii, 32—36; Rom. vi, 12, 14;—approbation of conscience, 2 Cor. i, 12;—foretastes of heaven, &c, Rom. v, 2. This induces,

4. *A hearty obedience to his laws.* He is the King whom God hath set upon his holy hill of Zion, Psa. ii, 6, 7;—and to him we are under the law, 1 Cor. ix, 21;—he is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him, Heb. v, 9. Obedient faith saves—from the condemnation of inconsistent professors, Matt. vii, 21–23;—and ensures defence in danger, direction in difficulty, &c, John vii, 17, and ix, 31. The believing thus required, embraces,

5. *A hearty expectation of his promises;*—as they refer to grace here, and to glory hereafter. "We are saved by *hope*," Rom. viii, 24;—from the baleful effects and undue influence of the smiles or frowns, the pleasures or cares, of the world, 1 John v, 4;—into the enjoyment of resignation, tranquillity, heavenly-mindedness, &c;—and, finally, from the eternal torments of hell;—and into the company, and employment, and raptures, of heaven, 2 Pet. iii, 10—14.

Do we believe? The question may seem preposterous in an assembly of *Christians;* but let us distinguish between *faith* and the mere *prejudice of education.* Do we *thus* believe? and

do the fruits of faith, which have been mentioned, appear on us? If not, how dangerous our case, John iii, 36. Let the convinced penitent pray for that faith which brings pardon and peace, Eph. iii, 8;—and let those who have "*received* Christ Jesus the Lord," so walk in him, as, by the exercise of grace and the receiving of fresh supplies, to become "*strong in faith*, giving glory to God."

ZETA.

XXXIX.—*The Gospel candidly received by the Bereans.*

ACTS xvii, 11, 12.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica; in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women, which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

THE ministry of the gospel is evidently an ordinance of Divine origin. It was the special office and employment of the Son of God, when he came into the world, "not to be administered unto, but to minister." He, therefore, "went about doing good, healing all manner of diseases, and preaching the gospel to the poor:" he also appointed twelve of his disciples, whom he called apostles, and sent them to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," to invite them to repent, and receive the Messiah. And when he rose from the dead, he *confirmed* and *enlarged* their commission, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Having, therefore, received such authority, they went forth in the name and under the influence of their Divine Master, "testifying repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ:" but their message met with a great diversity of treatment from opposite characters, and in different places. Some rejected it with contempt, as "a cunningly devised fable," and cruelly persecuted its messengers, as propagators of heresy and sedition: but others gladly received their word, and became the happy subjects of its saving influence. This was eminently the case with the noble Bereans. The apostles having been driven by

persecution from Thessalonica, they came to Berea: and, according to their usual custom, they "went into the synagogue of the Jews, and preached peace by Jesus Christ;" their word was attentively heard, and candidly examined; and the results were highly encouraging and successful. Many were deeply affected, and brought to a knowledge of the truth; whose believing reception of the gospel is honourably recorded in the language of the text:—"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica," &c. In considering the conduct and conversion of the ancient Bereans, we may observe—the *manner* in which they embraced the gospel,—the *effects* with which it was accompanied,—and the *commendation* with which they were honoured.

I. THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY EMBRACED THE GOSPEL. We are assured, that "they *received* the word with all *readiness* of mind," &c. How very different is the conduct of mankind in general. The gospel is frequently despised and rejected without being either patiently heard, or duly investigated; but the generous Bereans certainly acted a more "noble" part, and gladly embraced the apostolic doctrine as "the word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe." They received it,

1. *With devout attention.* They respectfully regarded the apostles as men of wisdom and piety, and treated them with becoming civility and kindness;—they willingly heard the sacred truths which they inculcated, and anxiously desired to comprehend the various aspects and bearings of their inspired ministrations. The gospel is unquestionably a subject of paramount importance; and as it involves our immortal happiness, it justly merits our supreme attention, 2 Cor. ii, 16;—we should regard its ministers as "ambassadors for Christ," sent to declare the counsel of God, and show unto sinners the way of salvation, Acts xxvi, 17, 18;—we should, therefore, hear the word of reconciliation, with minds deeply impressed with the sublimity of its doctrines;—with hearts duly prepared to receive it by faith;—with devout aspirations to God for his presence and blessing;—with sincere affection and gratitude, desiring to participate its saving power;—and with uniform regularity and diligence, embracing every opportunity, and improving every privilege, Luke viii, 18; James i, 21, 22.

2. *With impartial candour;*—For "they received the word with *all readiness of mind.*" They were free from obstinate bigotry and prejudice, and willing to embrace the truth under

any circumstances:—their disposition was peculiarly *liberal* and *ingenuous;* ever open to conviction, and desirous of instruction:—they were not biassed by the principles of education,—the fetters of custom,—the opinions of the learned,—the prejudices of the vulgar,—nor the terrors of persecution. The novelty of the gospel neither alarmed their fears, nor excited their contempt. They discovered an admirable simplicity and pervading energy, in the apostolic ministry, which captivated their hearts, and induced them to receive the word with intense *avidity* and "*readiness* of mind."—They were ready to imbibe Divine truth, on its own evidence, and willing to sacrifice every opposite principle, and contending interest. What a *noble* race of primitive disciples! what an exemplary spirit and conduct! The gospel invariably demands *such a reception*, and can only become personally profitable and saving, as it is received "in power,—in the Holy Ghost,—and in much assurance," Rom. i, 16; 1 Thessalonians ii, 13.

3. *With careful investigation.* They were not only serious and docile in their religious inquiries; but also, cautious and guarded in their adoption of the Christian system. They were too rational to condemn it without a candid hearing, and too philosophical to reject it without previous examination. The question at issue was infinitely important.—The apostles maintained that the Messiah had *actually* come, according to the writings of Moses and the prophets; but the Jewish rulers despised and crucified him as an impostor. To decide this interesting point for themselves, the impartial Bereans judiciously appealed to the divine oracles; and not only *hastily read*, but carefully "*searched* the Scriptures," to ascertain whether these things were so or not. And so earnest were they in the pursuit of truth, that this became their *daily* practice, and constant delight, Psa. xix, 7—11. Christianity invites scrutiny, and should be investigated with impartiality and faithfulness. It should not be assumed, merely on the ground of general profession, or popular applause; but only on the validity of the evidences which infallibly prove it to be, "the pillar and the ground of the truth."—If such a spirit and conduct were manifested by all who hear the gospel, it would be readily believed, and savingly enjoyed. This will evidently appear, if we proceed, from the manner in which the Bereans received the word, to consider,

II. THE EFFECTS WITH WHICH IT WAS ACCOMPANIED;—"*Therefore* many of them *believed*," &c. In this inspired

record of the primitive success of the gospel at Berea, we may recognise,

1. *The mode of its application;*—"Therefore many of them *believed.*"—They not only heard and investigated the doctrines submitted to their attention, but they gladly received the Saviour,—obtained the remission of their sins,—and were brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.—It is only by *faith* that the word preached becomes effectual to personal salvation. It is not sufficient that we diligently hear and cordially approve of it, as a system of revealed truth; we must also actually embrace it by living faith, as a message of life and peace, sent to save our souls from sin and death, John viii, 51. Many receive it in its word and letter *only*, who are utter strangers to its spirit and power. But faith credits the positions,—participates the privileges,—and obeys the precepts of the everlasting gospel, as the only way to obtain its saving benefits, and realize its promised felicities, Acts ii, 41; Heb. iv, 1—3.

2. *The nature of its influence;*—"*Therefore* many of them believed." This assertion intimates the close connection there is, between the *medium* and *object* of faith, and its *personal exercise;* or the influence of the former, on the production of the latter, Rom. x, 17. Their investigation of Christianity, was succeeded by a full conviction of its truth, and adaptation to their circumstances as sinners; and, "*therefore*, many of them believed with the heart unto righteousness, and made confession unto salvation." Their sincere and pious inquiries in the appointed means of instruction, were accompanied with a Divine energy; which led to an immediate apprehension, and actual adoption of the Christian system, in all its sacred principles, operations, and tendencies. It universally produces an enlightening, liberating, transforming, and hallowing influence in them that devoutly hear, examine, and embrace it by faith, John viii, 31, 32; 2 Cor. iii, 18, and x, 4, 5.

The character of its recipients;—"Many of them believed; also of *honourable women*," &c. The triumphs of the gospel are not confined to any specific class of sinners. All equally need its blessings, and must ultimately perish, without a participation of its blissful immunities. But all men do not receive its truths, and therefore remain ignorant of its glorious mysteries, and destitute of its gracious effects, Matt. xiii, 18—22. This, however, was not the case with the Bereans. The word of the Lord had free course, and was eminently glorified among them. Many of them believed to the saving of the soul, both

Jews and Greeks, men and women, rich and poor, learned and illiterate; and of these, "not a few," for a considerable number was turned from idols, to serve the living God. What a delightful scene! What a lovely multitude of believers, all of one heart, and one soul, striving together for the faith and hope of the gospel! "Oh what a choice, peculiar race!" How just and reasonable therefore, is,

III. THE COMMENDATION WITH WHICH THEY WERE HONOURED;—"These were *more noble* than those in Thessalonica." The Jews boasted that they were a *free* and *noble* people, as the descendants of Abraham, "the father of the faithful." In the case before us, the Berean Jews certainly displayed a liberality and nobleness of mind, worthy their high descent, in which they far excelled many of their brethren according to the flesh.

1. *They adopted a noble conduct.* They did not rudely persecute the apostles, like the unbelieving Thessalonians; nor reject their doctrine as erroneous without impartial inquiry, but wisely brought it to the *infallible test* of Scripture.—This conduct was truly rational and judicious, equally removed from the apathy of ignorance, and the folly of bigotry;—candid and liberal, being unbiassed by obstinate prejudice, or vain conceit;—calm and considerate, ungoverned by the rashness of malevolence, or the rage of persecution;—manly and religious, regulated by the dictates of conscience, and the decisions of revelation. Such *nobleness* of mind and practice, was highly honourable to its subjects; and is replete with instruction, to all who hear the joyful sound of gospel grace, Psa. lxxxix, 15, 16.

2. *They displayed a noble spirit.* Their disposition was peculiarly excellent and amiable, being deeply imbued with divine grace. They were evidently docile and humble, willing to be instructed, and gratefully receptive of evangelical truth;—open and ingenuous, free from mental illiberality and fastidious censoriousness;—serious and inquisitive, desirous to "understand the word of the kingdom," and fully comprehend "the truth, as it is in Jesus;"—devout and pious, searching the lively oracles of God with much prayer, to be made wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17.—This *noble spirit* becomes all mankind, and is absolutely necessary to "receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls."

3. *They exhibit a noble example.* This is certainly the practical design of the text, "for whatsoever things were written

aforetime, were written for our learning." What is here recorded of the Berean converts is highly exemplary, and worthy of our constant imitation. We should imbibe and display a similar spirit, and faithfully maintain a strict conformity to their Christian practice, Heb. vi, 12. We shall thus derive personal advantage from Scriptural examples; and the divine word, both *written* and *preached*, will become "a light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths," James i, 25.

In reviewing this subject, we should learn duly to estimate the ministry of the gospel,—carefully to avoid unprofitableness in the privileges we enjoy,—and personally to secure the immortal blessedness of those, who "hear the word of God and keep it."

ETA.

XL.—*The Objects, Design, and Requisition of Gospel Grace.*

ACTS XXVI, 17, 18.

"I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

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1. THESE words occur in the relation given by the apostle Paul of his conversion to Christianity; an event which was often referred to by himself, and has since been often appealed to by others, as a check to infidelity. It appears that the apostle's conversion was effected by means of our Lord's *personal* appearance to him. This personal appearance of Jesus, some considerable time after his death, proves the certainty of his *resurrection;* and his resurrection proves that he is the *Son of God*, the promised Saviour of the world, Rom. i, 4. Thus we have the fullest proof that Christianity is of God, and that Paul was divinely commissioned to teach it.

2. The narrative of this remarkable conversion being so important, we cannot but feel well pleased with that repetition of it which we find in this book: especially as each account of it contains some interesting particular, not mentioned in the others. When St. Luke records this event in the 9th chapter, he informs us what the Lord said to Ananias, ver. 10—16; when

St. Paul relates it himself in the 22d chapter, he informs us what Ananias said to him, ver. 12—14, and when he repeats it in this chapter, he informs us what our Lord said to him, ver. 15—18, "I am Jesus," &c. "I send thee to open their eyes," &c. These words teach us,

I. THE OBJECTS OF GOSPEL BENEVOLENCE,—or the persons to whom the gospel is sent. This we learn from the words which immediately precede our text, and from the text itself: here we are informed both who they are, and what they are.

1. *Who they are;*—They are the people, and the Gentiles. "Delivering thee," &c, ver. 17. By *the people* is meant the *Jewish nation*, who were God's chosen people, Deut. vii, 6;—a peculiarly favoured people, Deut. xxxiii, 29;—and a sinful people, who became rebellious, ungrateful, and degenerated, Isa. i, 2—4. To this people the gospel was first preached by Christ's command, Luke xxiv, 47;—and to this people will the gospel yet be preached with the happiest success, Rom. xi, 25, 26. By the *Gentiles* are meant *those nations of the earth which are not of Jewish extraction.* To them also the Messiah was promised, Isa. xlix, 6; for their benefit he was manifested in the flesh, Luke ii, 10, 11, 32; to them also the gospel is sent by repeated injunctions, Luke xxiv, 47; Mark xvi, 15; Matt. xxviii, 19; on their receiving the gospel, Christ redeems them from sin, Acts x, 34, Rev. vii, 9, 10; and they are promised to Christ for his inheritance, Psa. ii, 8. The people and the Gentiles must therefore include *all mankind;* and hereby we are assured that God wills the salvation of all the human race, Ezek. xxxiii, 11; 1 Tim. ii, 4. Having seen who they are to whom the gospel is sent, let us now observe,

2. *What they are*,—or in what state the gospel finds them. *They are in darkness;* for the gospel is sent to open their eyes, &c. They are in the darkness of *ignorance*, respecting the nature, necessity, and way of salvation, Psa. cvii, 10, 11. They are in *darkness;* for they have closed their eyes by a deliberate rejection of divine light, John iii, 19, 20; Matt. xiii, 15; and they are blinded by Satan, 1 Cor. iv, 4. *They are subject to the power of Satan.* This they evidently are, being *inhabited* by him, Eph. ii, 2;—*devoted* to his service, John viii, 44;—and *governed* by his will, 2 Tim. ii, 26. *They are condemned criminals;* under a sentence of eternal death, John iii, 18; Ezek. xviii, 20. *They are a disinherited family;* for they have justly forfeited their title to heaven, Rom. iii, 23; and they have no well-grounded hope of it, Eph. ii, 12. Thus our state, through

sin, is alarming; but God has remembered us in mercy, Psalm cxxxvi, 23. Of this our text also assures us, by teaching us,

II. THE DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL MISSION,—or the purposes for which it was sent.

1. *It is sent to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light. To open our eyes;* by calling our attention to the care of our souls, as the most important business of our lives, Matt. vi, 33; 1 Tim. iv, 8; Matt. xvi, 26. *To turn us from darkness to light;* by engaging us to come to Christ for illumination of mind, Eph. v, 14; Matt. xi, 29; John viii, 12.

2. *It is sent to turn us from the power of Satan to God.* To *turn us from the power of Satan;* from his *dominion*, by subduing our evil habits, 2 Cor. x, 4, 5; and from his *service*, by effecting an entire reformation in our conduct, Tit. ii, 12. To *turn us unto God;* with humble *contrition*, Luke xv, 18; with earnest *cries* for mercy, Luke xviii, 13; with *affiance* in his compassion, Psa. xiii, 5, and lii, 8; and with due *subjection* to his authority, Rom. vi, 13.

3. *It is sent that we may receive forgiveness of sins.* Gospel forgiveness implies, *full* forgiveness of all our past sins, both secret and open, Acts xiii, 38, 39. *Affectionate* forgiveness; such as exempts us from the punishment due to sin, and interests us in God's paternal favour, Psa. xxxii, 1, 2; Luke xv, 22—24. *Assured* forgiveness, which is attested by the Holy Spirit, Isa. xii, 1; Rom. viii, 16.

4. *It is sent that we may receive inheritance among them which are sanctified.* To be *sanctified*, is to be *separated from sin;* and *devoted to God's service*, Rom. vi, 22. This sanctification the gospel *requires*, 1 Thess. v, 23, 24, and iv, 7; and what the gospel requires, it instrumentally *produces*, Obad. 17; John xvii, 17. The *inheritance* of those which are *sanctified*, is *twofold;* a gracious inheritance in this life, 1 Cor. iii, 21—23; and a glorious inheritance in heaven, 1 Pet. i, 3—5. And *all who obey the gospel enjoy this inheritance*, Psa. lxxxiv, 11; Acts xx, 32. That we may ensure the enjoyment of this inheritance, our text teaches us,

III. THE DUTY OF GOSPEL SUBJECTS;—or the means by which its blessings are appropriated. All its benefits are obtained by faith in Christ; "By faith that is in me." Here observe,

1. *What faith in Christ implies.* It appears from God's word that it implies—*Coming* to Christ, for rest from sin and its consequences, Matt. xi, 28; John v, 35. *Receiving* Christ,

as our Teacher, Sovereign, and Redeemer, John i, 12; Matt. xi, 29. *Trusting* in Christ, for full salvation, pardon, acceptance, holiness, and heaven, Isa. xxviii, 16; Eph. i, 13. *Abiding* in Christ, till he comes to glorify us, 1 John ii, 28; Heb. xii, 2. And *walking* in Christ, by seeking all he calls us to enjoy, Col. ii, 6; Phil. iii, 12.

2. *The propriety of requiring faith in Christ as the means of salvation.* This is evident, because faith in Christ tends to inspire its subjects with the most profound *reverence for God*, who will not be approached by us without a Mediator, Psa. lxxxix, 7; Heb. xii, 28, 29; with *dread of sin*, which rendered Christ's sufferings necessary, that we might be saved consistently with God's rectitude, Heb. ii, 10; Rom. iii, 25, 26; with *confidence in God;* who has graciously given us the earnest of salvation, in the gift of his Son, Rom. viii, 32; with *gratitude* to God, for his redeeming goodness, 2 Cor. v, 14, 15; 1 Cor. vi, 19, 20; Rom. xii, 1; and with deep *humiliation*, through a consciousness that our salvation is ascribable only to divine grace, Eph. ii, 8, 9; Tit. iii, 5—7.

APPLICATION.

1. *From the duty of gospel subjects, learn the importance of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.—It is important*, as none can be saved without it, John iii, 36; Mark xvi, 15, 16. Hence, *seek salvation in no other way* but that of faith in Christ; not on the ground of mere mercy without a Mediator; for God will not admit sinners into his presence on these terms, John xiv, 6: not on account of your sufferings, for these being the effects of sin, can never remove their cause; not on account of your good morals, for you cannot atone for past offences by the imperfect fulfilment of present duties, Psa. cxliii, 2. *Rest in nothing short of faith in Christ.* Not in partial reformation, nor in correct opinions, nor in the mere outward form of godliness. Now actually come to Christ, receive him, and trust in him, Acts xxii, 16. *Persevere in the exercise of faith;* its continuance is necessary, Heb. x, 37.

2. *From the design of the gospel mission, learn your privileges as believers in Christ. Consider the blessings* you are called to enjoy; these are illumination, conversion, pardon, sanctification. *Examine yourselves;* are you thus turned from darkness to light; from the power of Satan unto God? have you received forgiveness of sins? are you sanctified,—redeemed from sin, and devoted to God? have you heaven in prospect?

can you say with the apostle, 2 Cor. v, 1 ; 1 Pet. i, 3. *Expect* those blessings, if exercising faith in Christ; they are purchased for you, promised to you, and are now ready to be imparted, John xi, 40; Luke xiv, 17.

3. *From the objects of gospel benevolence, learn your duty as the followers of Christ.* As his professing followers you are called to *imitate him*, Phil. ii, 5; 1 John ii, 6. Like him, have *compassion* on perishing sinners; whether relatives, the rising generation, adult neighbours, or the heathen world. However distinguished, their case is truly pitiable; for they are blind, enslaved, perishing, helpless, and hopeless, Job vi, 14. *Impart gospel truth to them*, that they may be healed of their diseases, and saved from their destructions, Psa. cvii, 20. *Your consistent Christian zeal will be attended with the happiest results.* Hereby you will concur with God in fulfilling the Messiah's request, Psa. ii, 8; you will promote the glory of God, Isa. lxi, 1—3; and you ensure eternal honour to yourselves, Dan. xii, 3; 1 Pet. v, 3.

ALPHA.

XLI.—*Misery, Shame, and Death, the Fruits of Sin.*

ROMANS vi, 21.

"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."

"GODLINESS is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv, 8; while sin is the parent of misery and the harbinger of destruction, James i, 15. To convince you, therefore, of the folly wickedness, and danger of sinning against God, this text of Scripture has been selected, which contains an appeal to Christians; and from whence we learn that *sin is unprofitable—that the penitential effect of sin is shame—and that the end of sin is death.*

I. SIN IS UNPROFITABLE. "What fruit had ye," &c. Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God, 1 John iii, 4. And the unprofitableness of sin will appear when we consider,

1. *That its pleasures cannot satisfy the soul.* The sweetest delights of sin are uncertain, and of short date. Those who

violate the law of God by following the dictates of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, find ten thousand vanities to betray hope and torture the soul by disappointment. The desires of an immortal spirit have a kind of infinity, and can never be satiated by the fleeting things of sense: the soul, whose duration is not measured by time but by eternity, must have a good suited to its nature, otherwise there will be an aching void; and this led Solomon, the king of Jerusalem, to exclaim, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," Eccles. i, 2. Sinners are frequently projecting schemes, and anticipating the greatest pleasure in their prosecution; but in many instances Haman finds a Mordecai, Esther iii, 5; or, like Belshazzar at the sumptuous feast, the hand-writing against the wall imbitters every comfort, Dan. v, 1—9. Sensual delights and carnal gratifications leave a sting behind, Isa. lvii, 21.

2. *The misery and wretchedness in which it involves its subjects.* See Cain wandering as a fugitive and vagabond, Genesis iv, 11, 12;—the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by fire from heaven, Gen. xix, 24;—Korah and his company visited by an awful providence, Numb. xvi, 18–35;—Ananias and Sapphira falling lifeless at the apostle's feet, Acts v, 1—10. How many, by abandoning themselves to vice, have superinduced disease, and with an emaciated body fallen into the arms of death. See the effects of covetousness, lying, and dishonesty; visit our prisons, and look at the list of culprits under sentence of death. What scenes of misery! Distress in its most piercing forms,—wretchedness which human language cannot describe,—and horror which vocal powers cannot depict, are the legitimate offspring of sin.

3. *Its demoralizing and destructive influence.* As the snow-capped mountain spreads a chilling influence on the inhabitants of the vale, so one sinner destroyeth much good, Eccles. ix, 18. The baneful effects of vice on society are seen on every hand;—"Evil communications corrupt good manners," 1 Cor. xv, 33. There you behold an ungodly father bringing his wife and children to ruin; an unprincipled mother destroying every vestige of social happiness; a prodigal son bringing his father's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave; a seduced daughter abandoning herself to every vice; a wicked neighbour disturbing the quiet of society; a vile calumniator traducing the character of his friend; a specious deceiver ruining the industrious tradesman; and a rebellious subject attempting to overthrow the government under which he lives. In all these instances we see the unpro-

fitableness of sin, and the misery following in its train;—it profiteth not, Job xxxiii, 27.

II. THE PENITENTIAL EFFECT OF SIN IS SHAME;—"Those things of which ye are now ashamed." There are some monsters of impiety, who declare their sin as Sodom, and glory in their shame, Jeremiah vi, 15; and others, an exposure of whose crime makes them ashamed: but the persons to whom our apostle appeals are ashamed,

1. *At the remembrance of their past folly.* They call to mind the talents they have abused—the time they have murdered—the oaths and blasphemies they have uttered—the religious ordinances they have neglected—the Christian Sabbaths they have broken—the mercies they have despised—the sins they have committed—the ingratitude they have displayed—and the irregularities in which they have indulged,—and they are ashamed. Confusion covers them at the thought of having abused the goodness of God—perverted reason—degraded human nature—trifled with Divine grace—and sported with eternal things.

2. *When they consider against whom they have sinned.* No longer disposed to extenuate their guilt, they say unto God, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," &c, Psa. li, 4; or, with Ezra i, 6, "I said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." The language of Jeremiah iii, 15, is not inapplicable to their state; while, with Dan. ix, 7, they say, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face."

3. *The circumstances by which their crimes have been aggravated.* Had they been destitute of light, there would have been some palliation of their guilt; but they knew better. When conscience checked them, they attempted to bury thought and drown reflection: they were admonished, but heedlessly pursued a course of impiety. Now they call to mind the cautions, warnings, and admonitions they have had—the engagements entered into with God—and the manner in which they were violated, and shame covers them as a garment.

4. *The influence their example has had on others.* They see friends poisoned by their skeptical principles—innocence betrayed to ruin under a pretence of affection—characters injured by their profligate life—and the cause of religion wounded by their impiety;—of this they are ashamed, while they consider,

5. *The situation in which sin has placed them.* Dishonesty has clothed them with disgrace—extravagance has reduced them to indigence—a dissolute life has unstrung every nerve.

and inebriety has destroyed the constitution. Although God may have blotted out their sin, they cannot forgive themselves; no, those are things whereof they are now ashamed: yet what abundant cause have they to thank God, who has not cut them down in their sin! especially when they consider,

III. THAT THE END OF SIN IS DEATH. It does not here mean the death of the body only, though that is the fruit of sin, Rom. v, 12, but of the soul and body; and that not by annihilation, but it imports,

1. *A perpetual separation of the whole man from God's heavenly presence and glory.* The first part of that sentence, which irrevocably fixes the sinner's doom, is, "Depart from me," Matt. xxv, 41; which words, though they do not signify any positive infliction and torment, yet they import the greatest loss that can be imagined. No doubt the misery of sinners will be increased by a contemplation of the happiness the saints enjoy, and themselves have lost; "when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven"—the pious with whom you were united on earth admitted to glory,—"and yourselves shut out." What distraction must fill the soul while the sinner calls for trembling rocks to hide his guilty head—but all in vain! Rev. vi, 16.

2. *The anguish of a guilty conscience;*—This is the worm that never dieth, Mark ix, 48. If even God were to inflict no positive punishment on sinners, the circumstance of their being left to bear the anguish of an awakened conscience, penetrated with a sense of guilt, and the arrows of the Almighty striking in the soul, must be a punishment indescribable. Add to this the influence of fear, horror, and rage, incessantly gnawing the immortal part. But there will be,

3. *The experience of the acutest pain;*—"Where the fire is not quenched," Mark ix, 44—48. The fearful and unbelieving, &c, "shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death," Rev. xxi, 8:—fire which enlightens no darkness—yields no comfort—destroys no existence—but inflicts unutterable and eternal punishment. They will have no respite from pain—no interval to relieve—no period to terminate their suffering; "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever," Rev. xiv, 11. Such is the end of sin.

INFER,

1. *How awful the state of sinners!* There is but a step between them and destruction! Let the thread of life break, and

their doom is fixed! Awake, therefore, thou that sleepest, Eph. v, 14; repent—fly to Jesus.

2. *How important the duty of every Christian.* Thank God, who of his abundant mercy in Christ Jesus hath delivered you. Go in peace, and sin no more; and now that you are converted, endeavour to promote the salvation of others, Jude 22, 23.

KAPPA.

XLII.—*The Blessed State of Believers.*

ROMANS vi, 22.

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

IN this chapter the apostle shows that the gospel does not offer a freedom from moral obligation, but rather enjoins practical holiness; and that the assertion that Christian teachers encouraged their disciples to sin, was nothing less than vile calumny, since they affirmed that the doctrine of Christ has the direct contrary tendency, ver. 12—23. So far from Christians being the servants of sin, which they were prior to conversion, they are now free from sin; they are the servants of God—they have their fruit unto holiness—their end is life everlasting.

I. BELIEVERS ARE FREE FROM SIN. By believers we are to understand those who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, have repented truly of their sins, and believed with the heart unto righteousness, Rom. x, 10. Such having received the Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, and being brought into the liberty of the children of God, are free from,

1. *The accumulated guilt of sin.* "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," &c, Rom. viii, 1. Having believed on Jesus as their substitute and ransom, they enjoy redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, Eph. i, 7. The curse of Mount Sinai does not alarm them, justice has ceased to threaten them, and conscience to accuse them. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, Rom. v, 1; and their language is,

'No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus and all in him is mine;
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown through Christ my own.'

2. *The tyranny of sin.* Formerly they were led captive by the devil at his will, enslaved to lust and passion, which used to debase and vilify them at pleasure;—in bondage to the strong man armed; but having believed with the heart unto righteousness, Jesus, a stronger than the strong man armed, Luke xi, 22, has emancipated them from their thraldom, agreeably to his own declaration, John viii, 36. Sin has not now the dominion over them, ver. 14. What the law could not do, Jesus has done, Rom. viii, 2, 3. God has not given them the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind, 2 Tim. i, 7.

3. *The love of sin.* Once they were allured by its charms, fascinated by its pleasures, and knew no greater happiness than the gratification of a disordered mind and polluted imagination; but being in Christ, they are new creatures, 2 Cor. v, 17. The soul in all its powers is revolutionized; they hate sin with a perfect hatred; while Jesus is the object of their highest esteem;—

'No charms like his to such are dear.'

4. *The defilement of sin.* Prior to conversion they were depraved in their hearts, vain in their desires, unholy in their affections, and without God; but being born of God, they sin not, 1 John iii, 9; and if at any time ungodly thoughts would obtrude on their minds, they are repelled with indignity, and not suffered to contaminate the soul. Such is the state of those who live in the constant exercise of faith on the Son of God.' But mature Christians are free from sin in a higher sense, having experienced the power of sanctifying grace bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. x, 5; they have proved the truth of that declaration, 1 John i, 7. Slavish fear is to them unknown, 1 John iv, 18. Let us not, however, imagine this implies a freedom from sinless infirmities, such as ignorance, a liability to err, &c.

II. THEY ARE THE SERVANTS OF GOD. *Servant* is a term of relation, and in our text signifies one who owes and pays obedience to God—is supported by his grace—and interested in his cause.

1. *They are governed by his will.* The servant of God is in covenant with his Maker; he has made a surrender of his person and services to the Lord, resolving to serve him faithfully till death: and as the master's will is the law of the servant, so the persons in question have no greater pleasure than in doing the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of the Most High. His statutes are their songs, Psa. cxix, 54; his commandments their delight, Psalm cxix, 143; his precepts their rule, Psalm

cxix, 94; and his word their guide, Psa. cxix, 105. The servant must not dictate to his master, but rather say with the Psalmist, cxxiii, 1, 2.

2. *Supported by his grace.* The servant looks to his master for support and protection, and Christians to their Lord. In the covenant agreement they have avouched the Lord to be their God, Deut. xxvi, 17; and he has engaged to supply their need, Psa. xxxvii, 19;—to deliver them in trouble, Psa. i, 15;—to support them under trials, Isa. xli, 10;—to be with them to old age, Isa. xlvi, 4;—never to leave them, Heb. xiii, 15;—but bring them to his kingdom, John xii, 26.

3. *Interested in his cause.* The faithful servant is concerned to promote his master's interest: this is the object of his unremitting study and labour; and the servant of God has no greater pleasure than in spreading the common Saviour's fame. It is not a matter of indifference to him whether the church is clothed with mourning, or garments of praise; whether the number of Zion's travellers are increasing or diminishing: no; he feels the work of God of paramount importance; hence his time, talents, influence, and pecuniary aid, are most cheerfully devoted to God. The love of Christ constraineth him while he labours to accelerate the spread of the gospel.

III. THEIR FRUIT IS UNTO HOLINESS. Before, they were servants of sin, and free from righteousness, ver. 20; but now being free from sin, and servants of God, their fruit is unto holiness.

1. *The fruit of their hearts.* Having experienced the power of regenerating grace, the stream of nature's tide is turned; the understanding being enlightened, and the conscience purged from dead works, the affections are heavenly, the imagination chaste, the desires pure, and the motives sincere and upright. Being crucified with Christ, ver. 6, they are no longer under the dominion of pride, anger, malice, fretfulness, revenge, lust, envy, covetousness, &c. The fruit of that spirit which all have who are in Christ Jesus is love, joy, peace, &c, Gal. v, 22, 23.

2. *The fruit of their lips.* The grace of God keeps the tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slander: in their lips is no guile; their conversation is modest and chaste, not frivolous, light, trifling, and obscene, calculated to pollute and disgust, rather than edify. The principles of religion in the heart govern the lips. Their conversation being as it becometh the gospel of Christ, is calculated to administer grace to the hearers.

3. *The fruit of their lives.* Holiness to the Lord is the

Christian's motto. If the tree be good, the fruit will be good, Matt. vii, 17. An ungodly life is the evidence of an unrenewed heart, though a moral life is not always the result of a renewed heart; a man may be moral without religion, but no man can be religious and immoral. The servants of God are true and just in their dealings, peaceable in their demeanour, merciful according to their power, and useful as talents and opportunity will admit; the law of God is their rule, and not the maxims of the world. What God hates, they disapprove; what he forbids, they avoid; and what he commands, they do.

IV. THEIR END IS EVERLASTING LIFE. This is a consummation of blessedness, of which, at present, we know but in part: it imports, however,

1. *A state of uninterrupted and eternal union with Christ.* The language of a Christian on earth is, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," Gal. ii, 20; and as the branch derives its nourishment from the vine, so the believer lives in Christ, Col. iii, 3, 4; and death, which separates soul and body, will render this union complete; they shall be for ever with him who has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also," John xiv, 19; from him they will derive eternal supplies.

2. *A state of active and delightful employment.* We cannot conceive that it will be merely a state of existence; no doubt the delights of that life will be heightened by looking at the way in which God conducted them through the wilderness—the dangers they escaped—the deliverances they obtained—and the wisdom of God in all his dealings towards them. At present our knowledge is imperfect, but then it will be complete, 1 Cor. xiii, 12. Our chief employment will be in beholding the rapturous vision of Christ, and singing his praises, Rev. v, 12, 13, and xiv, 1—5.

3. *A state of the highest enjoyment.* Of this Christian experience enables us to form some idea. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life," John iii, 36; which is already begun in the peace, joy, satisfaction, and comfort he feels; but it is in proportion to the enjoyment of heaven only as a drop compared with the ocean, the light of a taper with the sun, or a grain of sand with the terraqueous globe. The powers of the mind will no doubt be vastly expanded, and though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, &c, 1 John ii, 2. One of the elders informed John, that besides a freedom from every thing that can give pain, the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne

shall feed them, &c, Rev. vii, 17. "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun," Rev. xxii, 5.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. This life is the gift of God, ver. 23. 2. The characters to whom it is given are stated in our text. Let no man deceive himself. 3. Let us all seek this gift in God's authorized way, viz. by repentance and faith; remembering that the important design of Christ's coming into the world was to impart it, John iii, 16, x, 10.

KAPPA.

XLIII.—*The Kingdom of God, and its Subjects.*

ROMANS xiv, 17, 18.

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men."

THIS excellent chapter is of high importance to the church of Christ in all ages, as a directory concerning things indifferent—as a comment on the rights of conscience—and as a preservative from uncharitableness. It was occasioned by some unpleasant misunderstandings which existed between the Jewish and Gentile converts in the church of Rome; and the design of our apostle was to remove those misunderstandings, or to prevent their ill effects. With this view, he exhorts them to mutual candour and brotherly love, by various arguments. These arguments he deduces—from *the kindness of God in receiving them all to his favour*, ver. 1—4; from *the consideration that both were upright in their intention*, 5—9; from *the prerogative of Christ as their Judge*, 10—12; from *the love of Christ in dying for them*, 13—16; and from *the nature and requisitions of God's kingdom*. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," &c. These words describe the kingdom of God,—and its subjects. They describe,

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

1. *This phrase, "The kingdom of God," has various meanings; it occurs in various parts of God's word.* Sometimes it signifies *the gospel;* which promulges the laws, and exhibits the blessings of God's kingdom, Luke ix, 2, 60. Sometimes it signifies *heavenly glory;* with which the subjects of God will be rewarded in a future state, Luke xiii, 33, 39; 1 Cor. xv, 50. Sometimes it signifies *the militant church of Christ*, or the community of his faithful followers on earth, Mark i, 14, 15. The kingdom of God, as mentioned in our text, must be understood in this *last* sense; as meaning that holy community, which God by Christ has established in this world, for the purpose of preparing mankind for heaven.

2. *This community is properly called a kingdom*, because it has a *King*, *laws* and *subjects* belonging to it. The *King* that *governs* it, is *our Lord Jesus Christ*, Luke i, 33; Acts v, 31;—the *laws* that *regulate* it, are *the precepts of the gospel*, Matt. xxviii, 20; 1 Cor. ix, 21;—the *subjects* of it are *believers in Christ*,—who *come* to him for salvation, Matt. xi, 28,—who *receive* him in all his offices, John i, 12,—who *follow* him, as their shepherd, example, and portion, John xii, 26,—and who *trust* in him for all he has purchased and promised, Psa. ii, 12.

3. *The community thus established is called the kingdom of God*, because God *engaged* by his *prophets* to *set it up*, Isa. ix, 6, 7; Dan. ii, 44. It is actually *established* by *God's authority*, Phil. ii, 8—11; *God* is *glorified* by its *administration*, Isa. lxi, 1—3; and God's *heavenly kingdom* is replenished with *subjects* by means of this establishment, Acts xxvi, 18; Rom. vi, 22.

4. *This kingdom is here described both negatively and positively.—Negatively;* it is not meat and drink: that is, the *great duties required* in this kingdom consist not in a scrupulous abstinence from certain meats and drinks; these things it leaves indifferent, and as such they should be regarded by us, 1 Tim. iv, 3, 5; and *the privileges enjoyed* in this kingdom consist not in the low gratification which meat and drink can afford, Psa. iv, 6, 7.—*Positively;* it is *righteousness, and peace*, and *joy in the Holy Ghost:* that is, the *duties* and *enjoyments* of God's kingdom consist in these things: *in righteousness;* comprising the righteousness of *faith imputed* to us, Rom. iv, 5; righteousness of *heart, implanted* in us, Psa. li, 10; and righteousness of *conduct, wrought* by us, Matt. xxii, 39—41; 1 John iii, 7; Acts x, 34:—*and peace;* including assured *peace with God*, Rom. v, 1; and a *peaceable disposition*, which renders us careful to avoid giving offence, Acts xxiv, 16; and to seek peace

wherever it is attainable, Heb. xii, 14; Rom. xii, 18; Matt. v, 9:—*and joy in the Holy Ghost;* this must be the joy of *deliverance*, Psa. xiv, 7, and cxxvi, 3; the joy of *security*, Psa. lxiii, 7; the joy of *victory*, Rom. viii, 37; Exod. xv, 2; and the joy of *hope*, Rom. v, 2, and xv, 13. This is the joy in the Holy Ghost, being the fruit of God's Spirit, Gal. v, 22. It is a *holy* joy, not a carnal one, arising from the gratification of pride, malevolence, or sensual appetite. Our text having thus described the kingdom of God itself, now proceeds to describe,

II. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS KINGDOM. "For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men." These words teach us what the subjects of God's kingdom *do*, and what they *are*, with respect both to God and men.

1. *What they do.* They serve Christ in these things;—by cheerfully *doing what he requires* of them, John xv, 14;—by *concurring with him in promoting the salvation of their own souls.* He came to save them, 1 Tim. i, 15; and they work out their own salvation, Phil. ii, 12, 13. He gave himself to redeem and purify them, Tit. ii, 14; and they cleanse themselves, 2 Cor. vii, 1.—And *by promoting the interests of Christ's kingdom* around them. For this purpose they form holy *resolutions*, Josh. xxiv, 15; for this purpose they employ their talent of *influence*, Gen. xviii, 19; Psa. ci, 6, 7; for this purpose they engage in frequent *conversations*, Psa. xxxvii, 30, 31; Prov. x, 21; for this purpose they study to *please others*, Rom. xv, 2; 1 Cor. x, 33; for this purpose *they unite in fervent intercessions*, Isa. lxiii, 1; Luke xi, 2; and for this purpose they *walk* with *holy circumspection*, Heb. xii, 13; Matt. v, 16. Having observed what the subjects of God's kingdom do, let us consider,

2. *What they are.* "They are acceptable to God, and approved of men."—*They are acceptable to God:* their *persons* are acceptable, Rom. xii, 1;—their *services* are acceptable, Matt. xxv, 31;—their *sacrifices* are acceptable, Heb. xiii, 16;—they are acceptable through *Christ*, 1 Pet. ii, 5;—they are acceptable, whether observant of the Jewish ritual or not; for faith in Christ, working by love, is what God requires, and all that he requires, to render us his approved subjects, Gal. v, 6; 1 Cor. vii, 19.—*They are approved of men.* This must be taken with some restriction: by the men here mentioned must be understood, all those who deserve the name of men; that is, all those among mankind, who are pious, reasonable, and candid. By all such God's faithful subjects are approved; as *their religion adorns human nature*, Prov. xii, 26; Phil. iv, 8; as *it*

promotes the welfare and comfort of civil society, Prov. xiv, 34, and xxix, 2; and as *it ensures the happiness of its possessors*, James iii, 17, 18; Eccles. ii, 26.

APPLICATION.

Learn from this subject, 1. *The insufficiency of a mere form of godliness.*—Including correct opinions, baptism, and a regular attendance on divine ordinances, Gal. vi, 15.

2. *The importance of seeking this Scriptural Christianity*, Job xxii, 21. All excellencies without this are insufficient, 1 Cor. xiii, 1—3. This will render you holy and happy in yourselves, acceptable to God, and a general blessing to mankind, Psa. lxxxiv, 11, 12.

ALPHA.

XLIV.—*An Incentive to Christian Liberality.*

1 COR. x, 32, 33.

"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

IT appears that the Corinthian Christians were in danger of being entangled in some idolatrous practices. Hence, in ch. viii, the apostle cautions them against eating in an idol's temple. In this chapter he advises them respecting the use of meat which had been offered in sacrifice unto idols, but which had afterwards been regularly sold in the shambles: and he reminds them, that although the meat is never the worse for having been so offered, and therefore they might innocently eat of it, provided no one would be injured by their doing so; yet, even in this case, if their conduct would wound weak consciences, or be misconstrued into an approval of idolatry, ver. 28, they were to abstain. And in conclusion, he gives them two general rules: "Whether, therefore," &c, ver. 31;—here is a rule of *piety*. "Give none offence," &c, ver. 32, 33;—here is a rule of *charity*; which displays the apostle's object, and his method of attaining it.

I. THE GREAT OBJECT AT WHICH THE APOSTLE AIMED;—the *profit*, the *salvation*, of *many*. The term "profit" may apply, in general, to any thing which improves either the man

or his condition. So "wisdom is profitable," &c, Eccl. x, 10; and Paul profited in Jewish learning, &c, Gal. i, 14. But as happiness is man's *summum bonum*, his highest good, whatever promotes this, evidently deserves to be so characterized. In this view *salvation* appears to be eminently profitable; not only as it enables us to *think and judge correctly* on subjects of highest interest,—such as our own lapsed and ruined condition, and the relations in which we stand to God, as our holy and righteous Sovereign, as the merciful projector of human redemption, &c, and to *act consistently* with our knowledge, our duty, and our interest; but also, and chiefly, because it is a deliverance from numerous evils, and an introduction to pure, exalted, and everduring enjoyment. Viewed extensively, it is a

Deliverance from the shackles of superstition;—of superstition, erroneous in sentiment—extravagant in its hopes, fears, &c,—painful in its services—and prodigal of human life. Witness the ancient, and witness the modern history of the heathen world.

Deliverance from *the guilt of sin*, and from that *danger* which *always*, and from those *fearful anticipations* which *frequently*, attend it; danger of eternal torments,—and fear in proportion to the strength and clearness with which that danger is apprehended, Acts xvi, 30, 31.

Deliverance from *the slavery of sin*, Rom. vi, 12—14. Whether this be a benefit or not, we may learn from the *friends* of those who ruin their reputation, squander their property, and involve themselves in disgrace and trouble; or from those who by intemperance have destroyed their health, and are now tottering on the margin of the grave; or from *the surviving relatives* of such as have hurried themselves prematurely into eternity. Hence the "*profit*" of this salvation is not confined to the person who is the subject of it; but extends to "*many*,"—to his *family*, his *neighbours*, &c, in the *prevention of evil*. His example no longer corrupts the innocent—encourages the profligate—hinders the feeble minded—interrupts and grieves the zealous, &c; but *the opposite* of all this, and therefore beneficial.

Salvation is also to be considered as an introduction to the *favour*, the *protection*, the *guidance*, *support*, &c, of the greatest and best of Beings; and to all the security, honour, peace, joy, pleasing anticipations, &c, which result therefrom.

It is an *abiding* profit. Look at the hour of *dissolution*: contrast the death of the *stupid* or the *raving* sinner, with that

of the *peaceful* or *triumphant* Christian, for whom to die is GAIN,—is *farther profit still.* Look onward to *the day of judgment;* and mark the contrast which our Lord and his apostles have drawn, Matt. xxv, 31—46; 1 Thess. i, 7—10. Look into *eternity;* and the profit of salvation will appear to be, the sum total of the difference between the everlasting torments of hell, and the various, endless felicities of heaven.

Such was the *great object* proposed;—great in its *nature;* it is man's perfection,—the image of God reimpressed on the soul:—great in its *effects;* raising, illuminating, ennobling, glorifying its subject:—great in its *extent;* "the profit of *many,*"—of as many as should fall within the reach of his influence; and of those, again, who might be benefited by *them,* and so on, *ad infinitum:* "Let *him that heareth* say, Come," Rev. xxii, 17. We proceed to consider,

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE APOSTLE ENDEAVOURED TO ATTAIN HIS OBJECT;—*The most disinterested and active benevolence,* exerting itself *in arduous and protracted labours,* and in the *sacrifice* of his own pleasure to that of others.

Observe his *disinterestedness;*—"Not seeking mine own profit." How different from the man who, when any subject is proposed to him, immediately inquires, 'What shall *I gain* by it?' Virtue is its own reward; and, doubtless, Paul would be profited by Christian exercises, as they would improve his temper, &c. Yet this was not what he *proposed.* The *liberal man* is happy in devising *liberal things;* but the heart of the *selfish* is so contracted and shrivelled, that happiness cannot dwell in it.

Mark the apostle's *benevolence:*—aiming at "the profit of many." We have been told that 'friendship is only a refined sort of self-love.' The gospel exhibits a nobler view of man's capabilities; and the example of its Author, and the influence of his grace, expand and purify the soul, and draw it out in generous good will to men, Rom. ix, 1—3; 1 John iii, 16.

Consider the apostle's *labours;*—"*Seeking* the profit of many;"—in *devising* plans to promote their prosperity, 2 Cor. xi, 28; and in carrying those plans into effect, by writing, travelling, preaching, &c, "instant in season and out of season; publicly, and from house to house."

Consider also the *sacrifices* he made. He sacrificed *his forms of religious worship,* as far as conscience would allow, 1 Cor. ix, 19—22; and all his *comforts, convenience, ease,* and, finally, even *life itself,* 1 Cor. iv, 11—13; 2 Cor. xi, 23—27.

The apostle deserves our approbation. How amiable does he appear in comparison of the *ambitious*, who involves the world in war and misery; the *avaricious*, whose extortions grind the face of the poor; the *self-willed*, who is a plague to his family, &c.

The apostle challenges our imitation,—of his *innocency;* "Give none offence," by intolerance, bigotry, wanton attacks on the peculiarities of others, unnecessary impositions, &c:—of his *condescension* and *courtesy;* "Even as I please all men;" by affable conciliation, by employing the *best manner* and *time* for advice, persuasion, reproof, &c:—of his *extensive charity*—to the "many," beginning at home, and extending not only through the ordinary relations of *domestic*, *civil*, and *religious* life, but to the support of every institution whose object is the diffusion of saving knowledge, &c. Does a missionary society, &c, ask your aid? Do not *selfishly* think, 'This shilling will purchase such or such article of superfluous dress,' &c; but emulate the apostle's spirit, and *benevolently* seek the *eternal* "profit of *many*, that they may be *saved*."

The conduct recommended is agreeable to *the best feelings of the human heart;* even misers respect what they have not resolution to imitate:—agreeable to *the genius of our religion*, which promotes "glory to God in the highest," &c:—agreeable to *the example of our heavenly Father*, who "maketh his sun to rise," &c. "Freely have ye received, freely give." It is what we shall all approve at the *hour of death*, and in *that day, when* "*every one shall receive the things done* in his body, *according to that he hath done.*"

ZETA.

XLV.—*The Christian's Triumph.*

1 CORINTHIANS XV, 57.

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

IN the preceding verses of this truly interesting chapter, our apostle has been meeting the sophisms and cavils which the infidels and skeptics of his day opposed to Divine truth; and, with the ability of "a master in Israel," has illustrated and defended that important doctrine of revelation, the resurrection of the

dead. And in the close of a luminous and cogent train of argumentation, he directs our attention to the powerful influence of the religion of Jesus Christ at those most solemn of all periods, the hour of death, and the morning of the final judgment: the passage immediately before us forming a kind of ejaculatory conclusion to the whole, expressive of the most lively sentiments of gratitude, for that transcendent victory which the believer, through the "Captain of (his) salvation," is enabled to achieve.

These words present to our serious consideration,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S GLORIOUS TRIUMPH.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS ACHIEVED.

III. THE MOTIVES TO GRATITUDE WHICH IT FURNISHES.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH naturally leads us to consider,—*the enemies encountered*,—*the conflict sustained*,—and *the success experienced*.

1. *The enemies encountered*. Victory supposes a state of warfare, and consequently assumes the existence of enemies. The Christian proposes the attainment of the image of God, and the promotion of his glory: together with the enjoyment of a celestial inheritance beyond the grave; and whatever is opposed to the nature of his object, and impedes its accomplishment, may very properly be denominated his adversary. The world, with its terrific frown, or its alluring and deceitful smile; the corruption and treachery of the human heart, and the mighty powers of hell, are united in close and potent combination against the Christian, and the heavenly object of his pursuit. This enmity is inveterate in its nature, and perpetual in its operation, Jer. xvii, 9; John xv, 19; Rom. viii, 7; 1 Pet. v, 8.

2. *The conflict sustained*. The warfare in which the Christian is engaged, requires the most prompt and vigilant exertion. In order to maintain his ground, and ensure success, his resistance must be *firm;* no compromise can be allowed; no pacific overtures can exist with safety; to hesitate and parley, is to give way to the enemy, and relinquish the palm of victory. It must be with *steady perseverance:* the conquering Christian maintains a firm opposition; not for a few months or a few years only, but he goes on from conquest to conquest, till his Captain calls him from the field, to his eternal reward. In the spirit of *humble dependance;* though he puts forth all his energies,—gives all diligence,—firmly and perseveringly maintains his post,—yet his hope of success is founded in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of his Divine Leader, 1 Pet. v, 9; 2 Pet. i, 5—10, and iii, 17; Rev. ii, 10, and xii, 11.

3. *The success experienced.* Sustaining this conflict with this constant steady reliance on his God, the Christian's conquest is *certain;*—the nature of the gospel economy, the omnipotence and truth of Jehovah: and the luminous testimony of every age of time, all unite to ensure this victory. It is *complete* and *perfect* in its nature;—the believer triumphs over the world, and self, and sin;—the sting of death is extracted, and the fear of it destroyed;—he exults over the falling powers of darkness;—quits terrestrial scenes;—ascends to the throne of the Deity;—and receives the victor's crown at the hand of the Captain of his salvation, 1 John iv, 4, 13; 1 Cor. xv, 55, 56; 2 Tim. iv, 6—8; Rev. iii, 21.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS TRIUMPH IS ACHIEVED. It is through the operation of Divine beneficence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence this conquest may justly be considered,

1. *Divine in its origin.* Man in his natural state, has no disposition for this conflict; nor does he inherently possess that strength which is necessary for conquest;—yea, so far is this from being the case, that all his inclinations and energies are in unison with those of the enemies of God, and decidedly hostile to the cause of truth, Gal. v, 19—21; therefore, both the disposition for conflict, and the strength for conquest, are derived,—they flow from the exhaustless fountain of goodness, through the channel of gospel provision, Jer. xiii, 23; 1 Cor. iv, 7; Ephes. ii, 1—8.

2. *Free in its communication.* "The *gift* of God." Every blessing bestowed upon man by the Author of all good, is communicated freely; because man is the subject of guilt and condemnation, and has nothing of a meritorious nature to recommend or entitle him to the notice of Jehovah;—nor can he, in any way, ever remunerate or benefit a Being who is self-existent, self-dependant, and eternal;—one who is in his own nature perfectly and independently happy, Isa. lv, 1; 2 Tim. i, 9.

3. *It proceeds through the medium of sacrifice.* "Through our Lord Jesus Christ." God is a being who is just as well as merciful: man, by transgression, has violated the rights of Divine justice, and offered insult to this perfection of the Deity:—justice required satisfaction; but poor insolvent, self-ruined man could render none. Jesus Christ became our "surety;" "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree." Justice is honoured: yea—

"Here the whole Deity is known;
Nor dares a creature guess,
Which of the glories brightest shone,
The *Justice* or the *Grace*."

See Isa. liii, 4—6; John i, 29; Rom. v, 8; Tit. ii, 14; 1 Pet. ii, 24.

III. THE MOTIVES TO GRATITUDE WHICH IT FURNISHES. The most lively gratitude is ever due from man to God, for the manifold favours which he continually receives at his hands; but the anticipation of this victory ought, above every other consideration, to excite the Christian to sing, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me praise his holy name;" because of

1. *Our entire unworthiness.* Man being in his natural state a rebel against God,—opposed to his government,—his holiness,—and his truth,—in short, decidedly hostile to all the perfections of his nature,—has nothing to expect, on the principles of justice, but the satisfaction of its claims, by an interminable perpetuity of suffering; for a being thus circumstanced to be delivered from this just extremity of wo, and to be enabled to triumph over "the last enemy," and participate the felicities of heaven, ought to call forth bursts of grateful adoration, Psa. xxxiii, 1.

2. *The amazing love which is displayed in this triumph.* The value of a gift is materially augmented, and the obligations to gratitude increased, by the difficulties and sacrifices which may be connected with its communication. Though nothing is difficult to the "Lord God Omnipotent," yet there is a sacrifice connected with the process of human redemption, of the most unparalleled description;—the Father delivered up the Son to poverty, ignominy, and death, in order to extricate rebellious man from the gulf of ruin, John iii, 16; Rom. v, 8—11; 1 John iii, 1.

3. *The glorious result of this victory.* The believer not only experiences a victory over the world and sin, and triumphs over the fears of death, but also enters the regions of immortality;—mingles with seraphic bands;—participates the glory of the Redeemer;—beholds, with ceaseless rapturous gaze, the transporting perfections of Jehovah;—swells the song of salvation;—and drinks full draughts at that exhaustless stream of joy which issued from the throne of God, Matt. xxii, 30; 1 Pet. i, 4; Rev. iii, 21, and vii, 15, 16, 17. Surely a victory replete

with such blissful consequences demands the highest strains of praise from those who have a lively anticipation of it.

This subject, 1. Suggests the institution of a minute inquiry respecting the part we are taking in this warfare. And,

2. Furnishes ample consolation to the conflicting suffering soldier of Christ.

OMICRON.

XLVI.—*Self-investigation recommended.*

2 CORINTHIANS xiii, 5.

"Prove your own selves."

IT is reported, that a celebrated divine of the last century was frequently accustomed to make the following remark: "Application is the life of preaching, and self-application the life of hearing." What were the sermons of the first preachers of Christianity, but plain pointed addresses to the hearts of their audiences? Nor was it in their sermons only, that they pursued this method; but their epistles also display the same characteristic marks of pointed application, addressed to the people of their charge:—we have proof of this before us,—*Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.* Let us notice,

I. THE MANNER HOW THIS PRECEPT SHOULD BE REDUCED TO PRACTICE. To *prove*, signifies to try, or bring to the touchstone; and it is a metaphor taken from the practice of assaying metals.

1. *Prove yourselves by the test of reason and conscience.* Reason is a noble faculty,—and, in reference to all the affairs of human life, it is of essential service;—this directs the husbandman, how to cultivate the soil,—the mariner, how to plough the ocean,—the artificer, how to form the implements and the utensils in common use,—and the man of science, how to pursue literature: and is reason only designed to fit us for living in this world? No; it is absolutely necessary in religion;—religion is a reasonable thing;—Christians have "a reason of the hope" that is within them;—and they only deserve to be denominated "men of reason." *Prove your own selves;*—bring yourselves to the test of reason, and the bar of conscience. Are your

principles rational? Is your experience sound? Are your views correct? Is your conduct consistent? And are you altogether what you ought to be, and what you profess to be?

2. *Prove your own selves by the test of Revelation;*—the Bible is a rule, *plain* in its directions,—*comprehensive* in its requirements,—*uniform* in its operations,—*divine* in its authority, and *certain* in its end. *Prove yourselves* by its doctrines; do you credit them?—its precepts; do you practise them?—its privileges, do you enjoy them?—its characters; do you resemble them?—Do it *seriously*, *impartially*, *universally*, and *constantly*.

II. THE MOTIVES FOR DOING IT. These arise,

1. *From the dignity of its origin.* It is a divine precept;—St. Paul wrote it to the Corinthians, but he wrote it under the influence of the Holy Ghost:—and "whatever was written aforetime was written for our instruction;" the Bible contains no useless precepts; no unnecessary duties; and if no other reason could be assigned, why we should regard the text, than the authority and dignity of its author, this alone should be sufficient; but we have,

2. *The reasonableness of its nature.* We are all liable to be deceived, and especially to be deceived concerning ourselves;—and among all the evils under the sun, nothing is more to be deprecated than self-deception;—how pitiable to see our poor fellow-creatures led on blindly to destruction;—soothing their consciences with the cry of peace, peace, while delusions, strong as hell, are binding them fast;—and how is this to be prevented, but by proving your own selves?—How can a mariner, who navigates a sea in a crazy vessel, amidst hidden rocks, and currents innumerable, know but what he may the next hour drive his bark against one of those rocks, if he neglect to throw out his line, examine his charts, and make his observations?—How can the traveller, who journeys in a solitary path, amidst the darkness of the night, surrounded by pits and precipices, know but the next moment he may dash himself to pieces, if he omit to ponder the path of his feet, and neglect to examine his footsteps?—And how can we tell, but what we may be ingulfed in perdition, the very next hour, if we will not prove our own selves?—Is it not reasonable for a man who is exposed to danger of a most alarming nature, to do his utmost to understand the nature of that danger? Is it not reasonable, for the governor of a certain fortress, who suspects the troops designed to defend it are in danger of betraying him to the enemy, to do what he can to prove the loyalty of those troops?

3. *From the general conduct of mankind.* Is not a spirit of inquiry natural to us? and do not caution and circumspection accompany us in our dealings with each other?—The merchant proves his goods,—the mathematician proves his problems,—the scholar proves his lessons,—the farmer proves his oxen; and shall we prove every thing rather than ourselves?—Are we more concerned to detect the defects of our goods than the errors of our souls?—to find out the *flaws* that are in our neighbour's character, rather than the *rents* in our own;—and the mote in his eye, rather than the beam in ours?—what can be of equal importance to you, with yourselves?—The loss of yourselves is the loss of every thing; therefore, *prove your own selves.*

4. *The advantage resulting from the practice. To prove ourselves*, is the most sure and certain way to know ourselves. Self-knowledge has been deemed such an important acquisition, that I should deem it unnecessary to attempt to illustrate its advantages: all knowledge without this, is little better than learned ignorance;—there may be extraordinary methods which God may choose, to make a man know himself; but it is presumption to expect, what the Lord has never promised to bestow. Comply with the precept in the text, and you can scarcely fail to know yourselves,—your fallen condition,—the desperate wickedness of your hearts,—the danger to which you are exposed,—and the path in which you should tread to escape hell, and secure heaven.

INFER,

1. Our principal business is with *ourselves;* and those who live much abroad,—and converse much with others,—pry into their secrets,—and investigate their affairs,—are in great danger of forgetting themselves. *Prove* your own selves,—not *talk* of yourselves,—*praise* your own selves,—*idolize* your own selves.—No,—were this the text, oh how many practical hearers should I have!

2. When we consider that the apostolic precept in the text was addressed to Christians, we may see how important that all should comply with it:—do it now; and pray with David, Psa. cxxxix, 23, 24.

BETA.

XLVII.—*The Christian Soldier's Warfare.*

EPHESIANS vi, 12.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

IN this epistle, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians of their great obligations to God, on account of the gracious favours in which they were interested; and having strongly urged them to a holy deportment answerable to their principles, their profession, and their privileges, he in conclusion exhorts them to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," ver. 12.

The *reason* why we should be "strong in the Lord," he assigns in our text. In improving and applying which let us consider,

I. THE ENEMIES WITH WHOM, AS CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, WE ARE CALLED TO CONTEND. The term "Christian soldiers," is thus employed, because in this paragraph, our apostle represents our present state as a warfare. Here we are instructed to observe,

1. *Our enemies are spirits;* not composed of flesh and blood. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with spirits. This implies, that *they are not material and compound beings*, but simple and immaterial; and as such, are capable of unwearied exertion. *They are not objects of sight and sense*, but invisible and impalpable; able to assault us when unperceived by us. *They are not inert in their natures*, but active and restless in the execution of their mischievous devices, Job i, 7; Matt. xii, 43. *They are not, and cannot be, subject to dissolution;* but, as spirits, they must be immortal. Here we are taught to observe,

2. *Our enemies are wicked spirits. They are maliciously wicked;* bent on injuring us. This is evinced *by their names:* a fallen spirit is called the *devil*, or calumniator; because he slanders men to God; he slanders God to men; and slanders men to each other. This he does for the purpose of sowing discord between God and his creatures, 1 Pet. v, 8. He is called *Satan*, an adversary; because he sets himself up to oppose us. He is called an *enemy;* because he is filled with enmity against us, Rev. xii, 12. He is called the *old serpent;* because in this

form he tempted Eve, Rev. xii, 9. He is called *Abaddon*, and *Apollyon*, the destroyer; because he desires and seeks our destruction, Rev. ix, 11. Their malice is also evinced *by their employment.* They go about seeking to destroy us: they seek to destroy our comfort, by depriving us of peace and joy in believing, 1 Pet. i, 6. They seek to destroy our piety, by divesting us of faith, hope, love, and purity, Luke xxii, 31. They seek to destroy our *usefulness*, by drawing us into sin, and rendering us stumbling blocks to those around us, Heb. xii, 15. They seek to destroy our *souls*, by engaging us in their service here, and bringing us to their own hell, hereafter, Matt. xxv, 41. *They are daringly wicked;* they are wicked spirits in high places: they first rebelled against God even in heaven itself; there was war in heaven, Rev. xii, 7. And they still approach the most sacred places that they may injure us; they assault us amid the avocations of civil and domestic life; in our religious retirement; in God's house; and even at his table, John xiii, 27.

3. *Our enemies are formidable spirits,*—being possessed of such qualities as are calculated to inspire terror. They are formidable on account of their *number:* it is not one enemy only that we have to contend with; we wrestle, or struggle against principalities. That our enemies are numerous is evident from the case of the demoniac, Luke viii, 30, who was possessed by a whole legion of them.

"From thrones of glory driven, by flaming vengeance hurl'd,
They throng the air, and darken heaven, and rule this lower world."

And it appears that numerous as they are, all of them are united, employed, and instructed to seek the ruin of mankind. They are formidable on account of their *strength:*—they are justly called "powers." Their power or ability to effect mischief, is evident from the case of Job, i, 12, ii, 6. They are formidable on account of their *weapons*, being armed with fiery darts; their injections are tipt with poison, and hurled with fury. They are formidable on account of their *extensive influence*,—being rulers of the darkness of this world. The ignorance and sinfulness of mankind are subject to them, and employed against us. They are formidable on account of their *wiles*, see ver. 11; for they are naturally sagacious; and must have acquired much skill by long experience. Having considered our enemies, let us observe,

II. In what manner we are instructed to contend with them. From what our apostle adds on this subject, our duty is evident.

1. *We must contend with them in the armour of God.* This armour must be *all put on*, ver. 11, 14, 17. The whole of it is absolutely necessary; if any part be wanting, whether it be the girdle,—the breast-plate,—the greaves,—the helmet,—the shield,—or the sword,—the consequence must be fatal to us. This armour we must *retain* till our warfare is past, 1 Tim. i, 18, 19. This armour we must *take* and use whenever assaulted, ver. 13.

2. *We must contend with them in the spirit of prayer and watchfulness*, ver. 18. Pray with *all prayer*, that you may be strong in the Lord; that you may be girded by his wisdom and assisted by his power in all temptations. And *watch* thereunto, with all perseverance; that you may not at any time fall into the snares of your enemies, Mark xiii, 37; 1 Thess. v, 6; Eph. v, 16.

3. *We must contend with them in the exercise of firm resistance.* You must wrestle with them; in doing this, *get* all the strength you can by prayer, and *use* it, by striving against sin. Let your resistance be *early;* never enter into any league, truce, or parley with the enemy: resist him at his first approach, 1 Thess. v, 22; let your resistance be *courageous;* expect certain victory, Psa. lxviii, 1, 2; 1 Cor. xvi, 13; and let your resistance be *unwearied*, till you conquer, Psa. xviii, 37, 38. That you may be animated to persevere in this warfare, consider,

III. THE REASONS BY WHICH WE SHOULD BE INDUCED THUS TO CONTEND. Thus contend,

1. *Because the most important objects depend on this contention.* Your *steadfastness* depends on it, for your enemies seek to cast you down, Psa. cxviii, 13; your *liberty* depends on it, for they contend with you for the mastery, 2 Tim. ii, 5; your *glory* depends on it, for they contend with you about heavenly places. Rev. iii, 11; your *eternal life* depends on it, for they aim at murdering your souls, John viii, 44; the best *interests* of your *connections* depend on it, for it is likely to be well or ill with them, as it proves with you, Deut. v, 29; Prov. iii, 33; and without *contention*, these objects cannot be secured, Matt. xi, 12.

2. *Because victory is certain to the faithful soldiers of Christ* Victory over the *world*, 1 John v, 4; victory over *sin*, 1 John i, 7; victory over *Satan*, Rom. xvi, 20; victory over *tribulation*, Rom. viii, 35—37; and victory over *death*, 1 Cor. xv, 55—57. Thus contend,

3. *Because victory will be attended with certain glory.* A *glorious rest* from all painful toil and contention, Rev. xiv, 13; *glorious exemptions* from all penal evil, Rev. ii, 11, and from all natural evil, Rev xxi, 4; and *glorious honours*, comprising the

public approval of Christ our judge, Rev. iii, 5; a glorious *throne*, Rev. iii, 21; a glorious *crown*, Rev. ii, 10; and a glorious *kingdom*, Luke xii, 32; Dan. vii, 18.

ALPHA.

XLVIII.—*The Christian's Triumph in Death.*

2 TIMOTHY iv, 7, 8.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

THE Christian sows for an eternal harvest,—he trades for immortal gain,—he fights for a crown of unfading glory,—his efforts, therefore, should correspond with the grandeur of the objects he pursues: on St. Paul these objects had their full influence, and never did a man labour or suffer with more heroic ardour than he. At length, he approaches the end of his career, he contemplates his death as certain, and just at hand. But this gives him no alarm; for, standing on the eminence of faith, he looks backward and forward, and finds the review of the past, and the prospect of the future, both conspiring to exalt his felicity; hence in a transport he exclaims, "I have fought," &c. This language presents us with a striking view of the Christian's life, death, and eternity. His *life* is a *combat*, his *death* is the *victory*, his *eternity* the *reward*;—his *life* is a *race*, his *death* its *successful termination*, his *eternity the prize*;—his *life* is a *deposite*, his *death* the *moment he lays it down*, his *eternity* the *recompense of his fidelity*. But as our text presents us with a survey of the past, and a contemplation of the future, we will consider,

I. THE APOSTLE'S REFLECTIONS ON HIS PAST LIFE. These breathe,

1. *The exultation of victory.* "I have fought," &c. The text throughout is supposed to allude to the ancient Grecian games; the first clause refers to the combat. Religion is a warfare, in which every man has to contend with his own evil nature, the flesh; to oppose his pride, his fear of man, his evil passions and tempers, levity, vanity, unbelief, &c; to "renounce the old man with his deeds;" to "crucify the flesh," &c. The

world also opposes the Christian, by its maxims, fashions, and examples;—its attractions and society;—together with its sneers, reproaches, and terrors:—Satan, also, and his legions stand ready to assist their allies—the flesh and the world. These must be watched with a vigilant eye,—resisted with a vigorous hand;—they must be repelled and vanquished. St. Paul did resist,—he did overcome,—he took the whole armour of God, Eph. vi, 11—20, and came off more than conqueror. This is a *good* fight; it is in a good cause,—conducted by good measures, 2 Tim. ii, 5,—attended by a good result.

2. *The language of successful constancy.* "I have finished my course," 1 Cor. ix, 25; Phil. iii, 13, 14; Heb. xii, 1—4. In the Grecian games, the candidates had to start from one point, to run to the same mark or goal, and to keep within certain limits marked out by white lines; if they broke over these lines, they were obliged to come back to the starting post, and begin anew. It was requisite also for every candidate, not only to begin, but to continue, and to strive to outstrip every competitor. Apply this; the Christian's mark is the accomplishment of all the will of God; his path is prescribed by the rules of Christian duty laid down in Scripture; repentance and faith are the first steps in this race: all must start from the same point; should any break over the path by sin, they must return and set off anew: perseverance also is necessary. This course St. Paul had constantly pursued, and at last he finished it with joy.

3. *The assertion of conscious fidelity.* "I have kept the faith." Some suppose this refers to his having kept within the prescribed limits; others, that he alludes to the custom among the Spartan women, who gave their sons, when they became soldiers, shields, which they were to keep, or die in battle: but I consider the apostle as referring to a deposite which he had faithfully preserved. By the faith we may understand the gospel, which reveals the *objects* of faith; contains the *rules* of faith, and urges the *motives* of faith; or, if the apostle speaks as a Christian only, by the faith we may understand the profession of Christianity, or the grace of faith, as a vital principle in the heart. This St. Paul had preserved, Heb. iii, 6—14, and iv, 14. Contrast this survey of past life with the fearful reflections of infidels, hypocrites, and apostates on their deathbeds.

II. THE APOSTLE'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS FUTURE PROSPECTS; "Henceforth there is laid up for me," &c. Here he expresses,

1. *The assurance of his own personal felicity; There is laid*

up for me. Notice, 1. The apostle's prize;—a crown of righteousness: contrast this with the prize won by the Grecian gamester. This crown includes the whole of the glorious reward of the saints in heaven, "A crown of righteousness;" it is the *purchase* and *result* of the righteousness of Christ, his righteous obedience unto death; it is the *recompense of righteous dispositions* and actions; it is the *enjoyment* of the most perfect state of righteousness. 2. *The dispenser of his crown*, "the Lord, the righteous Judge." 3. *The time of his coronation:* "that day," when the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall appear. In the ancient games, the conquerors were not instantly crowned; they waited till the depositions were heard, and the adjudication made. Thus the Christian, though his work is finished at death, yet he receives not his full recompense till the judgment day. His spirit will rest and enjoy felicity as a spirit, 2 Cor. v, 1; Phil. i, 23; but his justification as a saint, and his entire glorification, will be deferred till *that day.*

2. *His congratulation of others in the prospects of similar felicity;* "To all them also who love his appearing." Christians love the appearing of Christ, in his providence, in his ordinances, in their hearts, but more especially in the last day. In the Grecian games, one only in each species of contest could be crowned;—here, all may fight and conquer;—all may run the race, and win the prize;—all may receive the deposite, and preserve it inviolate.

Let us conclude,

1. By reflecting on the rapture which must have filled the apostle, at the thought of meeting thousands of his converts at the right hand of Jesus! And what consolation do pious ministers, and pious parents, derive from the hope of seeing their hearers, their children, and their friends, in the regions of bliss!

2. By contrasting the dreadful prospect of the dying sinner, with the blooming hopes of the Christian! Alas! the sinner has fought the battles of Satan,—run the race to destruction,—and kept his fidelity to hell. There is, therefore, laid up for him "treasures of wrath," &c;—"a fearful looking for of fiery indignation," &c.

3. By congratulating the believer on his present condition, and prospects of eternity.

4. By exhorting all henceforward to fight the battles of the Lord, to run in the Christian's course, and to seek and preserve the invaluable deposite of saving faith. DELTA.

XLIX.—*Noah's Faith and Obedience.*

HEBREWS xi, 7.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

THE character selected for our present consideration is particularly worthy of our attention and imitation. Though Noah lived in an age exceedingly corrupt and ungodly, he was deeply pious, and "found grace in the eyes of the Lord." He witnessed the most desolating calamity; and was placed in a situation extremely difficult and affecting:—yet, as a righteous man, he walked in holy fellowship with God;—and his eminent faith and obedience are *immortalized* in the text, for the *instruction* of all succeeding generations; "*By faith Noah*," &c. In this illustrious example of primitive piety, we may remark,

I. THE WARNING HE RECEIVED. "Noah being warned," &c. The apostle here refers to the well-known history of the destruction of the antediluvian world;—it was indeed an awful catastrophe, which was brought on mankind by their extreme corruption and abounding wickedness! But Noah, who was a faithful servant of God, was mercifully preserved from the overwhelming scourge. According to the text,

1. *He was warned of the approaching deluge.* It was an event which could not have been previously known had it not been revealed by God;—it was not the effect of a *natural cause*, but a *special judgment* of God, inflicted on incorrigible sinners. Long before its accomplishment, the Lord made known his purpose concerning it to Noah, for the instruction of himself and family, and for the warning of impenitent contemporaries. A distinct account of this revelation is found in the book of Genesis, chap. vi, 5–13.—Though these "things were *unseen as yet*," they were *certain* in their *fulfilment*;—and, in due time, fully came to pass according to the word of the Lord, Gen. vii, 17—23, &c. God is ever "slow to anger," and always *warns* before he *punishes*:—and hence,

2. *We are also warned of the impending danger.* Though we are not admonished of the same event that Noah was; yet we

are warned of "unseen things," which are *equally certain*, and much more *important* to mankind. All have sinned, and all are justly liable to suffer everlasting destruction. We are, therefore, *warned* of the danger of living and dying in our sins,—and of "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire," Ezek. xviii, 30—32; 2 Thess. i, 8, 9. Though these awful calamities are "unseen as yet," they are important *realities*, of which the Lord duly *warns us* by his word,—by his ministers,—by his Spirit,—and by his Providence, Ezek. xxxiii, 7—9, &c. The Divine warnings are faithful,—affectionate,—urgent,—and incessant;—let us, then *attentively receive and diligently obey* them. That such was the conduct of Noah, appears from,

II. THE OBEDIENCE HE DISPLAYED. "By faith Noah, moved with fear," &c. This inspired testimony reflects great honour on the character of this excellent patriarch, and fully explains the nature of his obedience, which is here so highly commended.

1. *He exercised implicit faith in God;*—he not only believed in his existence and perfections, but also, in all the *revelations* of his *will*, and the *promises* of the *Messiah;*—by *this principle* he obtained the blessings of salvation,—and was influenced in his general conduct;—and hence, his obedience is expressly attributed to faith in the text. "By *faith* Noah," &c, ver. 6. Faith is both a *saving* and *influential* principle;—Its *genuineness* must be proved by its *practical effects;*—it works by love,—purifies the heart,—regulates the life,—and grasps invisible realities. No obedience can be acceptable to God, but that which arises from unfeigned faith, Rom. xiv, 23; James ii, 17, 18, 26.

2. *He was influenced by the fear of God.* We cannot suppose he feared for the temporal safety of himself and family, for God had assured him of their preservation, Gen. vi, 18; and as a *just* and *righteous* character, he had no reason for *distressing fear* respecting his eternal welfare:—but as a man of piety, he no doubt felt greatly alarmed, by the sudden destruction of the human race. His faith produced a *reverential fear* of God;—a *compassionate fear* for perishing sinners;—and a *cautious fear* of personal vigilance and faithfulness. Genuine *faith* and holy *fear* characterize the people of God in all ages, Mal. iii, 16: Acts x, 35.

3. *He promptly obeyed the will of God.* He strictly performed the divine injunction, in "preparing an ark to the saving of his house." The Lord gave him *special directions* for this purpose, all of which he *fully* complied with, Gen. vi, 22;—he cordially believed the word of God, and his faith produced practical

conformity to his will. Though we are not required to "prepare an ark" for our safety, yet we are all commanded to seek an interest in Christ, the sinner's refuge, and "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," &c. And to encourage our imitation of Noah's character and obedience, we shall proceed to consider,

III. THE DELIVERANCE HE OBTAINED. He was greatly honoured by God, and spared as a *special monument* of divine mercy in the midst of wrath.

1. *He was preserved from the general ruin.* How dreadful is the thought;—how appalling the sight!—A world deluged with sin! The earth groaning and sinking under the crimes of its guilty inhabitants! The heavens opening, and pouring down the long-suspended vengeance on the incorrigible! "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and the flood came, and took them all away." How unprepared for such an awful change! Behold their frantic minds seized with unutterable horror and amazement! But where shall they look? To whom shall they go? Refuge fails!—the earth disappears!—all is gone! See them flocking around the ark—entreating, grasping, and wailing! But alas! It is all in vain; the door is shut, and the man of God, whom they had despised and insulted, is now preserved, and all his house, for his sake. "Verily there is a reward for the righteous."

2. *He condemned the impenitent world.* He did not *formally* condemn them as their *judge*,—but *ministerially*, as a "preacher of righteousness," and *practically*, by his pious example. His *faith* condemned their *unbelief;* his *obedience* condemned their *disobedience*, &c. Thus every good man *condemns* and bears witness against the follies and practices of the ungodly world, by a pious life and conversation.

3. *He obtained the righteousness of faith.* He was not saved by *works*, but solely by *faith*. He was justified and accepted of God, through the infinite merit of the promised Redeemer, which was imputed to him through believing. Such has ever been the only way of salvation for fallen sinners. From this instructive case we should learn to consider our danger—estimate the sinner's refuge—and "believe to the saving of the soul."

ETA.

L.—*The Triumphant Song of the Redeemed.*

REVELATIONS i, 5, 6.

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

THE Saviour having appeared in a vision to St. John, in "the isle of Patmos," he commanded him to write appropriate epistles to "the seven churches in Asia," to reprove their evils, correct their errors, and encourage their hopes. He therefore introduced the subjects of his addresses by an affectionate salutation in the name of the triune Jehovah; and having distinctly specified the Father and the Holy Spirit, he solemnly adds in the text, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness," &c. These words strikingly illustrate the *mediatorial character* of Jesus Christ—the *exalted privilege* of his believing people—and the *personal influence* of redeeming grace. Let us observe,

I. THE MEDIATORIAL CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST. This is admirably described by the apostle, in the words before us; in which he faithfully represents the various offices that he executes, as the Mediator of the New Covenant.

1. *He is the Prophet of his church.* Hence he is denominated, "the faithful *witness*." A *witness* is one who either *reveals* what was previously unknown, or *attests* what has been already announced. In both these respects Jesus Christ is "given to be a witness to the people." He has distinctly revealed the true character and will of God—the astonishing scheme and work of redemption—and the only way of salvation and eternal life, John iii, 16—18. The writings of Moses and the prophets were fully accomplished in him, for they "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." The comparative darkness of the law is passed away, and the meridian light of the gospel now shineth. The Sun of Righteousness hath arisen on the moral world, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death. As a teacher come from God, he "spake as never man spake;" and as an immutable witness, he still externally reveals and personally attests divine

truth, both by the medium of his word, and the influence of his Spirit, Rom. viii, 14—16; 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17. The testimony of Christ is invariably true, for he is the *faithful witness*, whose veracity is infinite, and fidelity infallible. He has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel; he guides his people into all truth, and makes them wise unto salvation, Isa. liv, 14.

2. *He is the High Priest of our profession.* This is evidently intended, when he is called, "The first begotten of *the dead*." His death and resurrection were important parts of his priesthood, and essentially connected with the salvation of sinners. An atonement was absolutely necessary, and therefore Jesus Christ, in matchless love, "took upon him the seed of Abraham, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." By his *sacrificial death*, he fully atoned for our iniquities, and opened a new and living way to the Father, Heb. x, 18—22. He also rose again for our justification, and is now "the resurrection and the life, having obtained eternal redemption for us." He is therefore emphatically, "the first begotten of the dead," because he is the first who ever rose to die no more; and his resurrection clearly demonstrates the efficacy of his sacrifice, and is the strongest pledge of the blissful immortality which awaits his people in the world to come, Luke xxiv, 46, 47; 1 Cor. xv, 20. As the High Priest over the house of God, Christ is our "Advocate with the Father," and the altar which sanctifieth both the giver and the gift. Through him alone we have access to the throne of grace; and our persons and services are accepted by virtue of the life and death of him, who once suffered for our sins, and now "ever liveth to make intercession for us," John xiv, 6; Heb. iv, 14—16.

3. *He is the Sovereign of the universe.* His dominion is supreme and unlimited, reaching through all space, and extending to all duration. He is therefore justly acknowledged "the Prince of the kings of the earth;" for by him "kings reign, and princes decree justice." As *essential* God, his kingdom ruleth over all things, and he *only* sways the sceptre of universal empire, and sustains supremacy of character, as "the King of kings, and Lord of lords." And as "the Mediator between God and man," he has founded a kingdom of grace, in which he triumphantly reigns for the salvation of mankind, Dan. ii, 44; Matt. iii, 2. This kingdom is spiritual in its character, and perpetual in its duration. All other empires are worldly and perishing; but the kingdom of Christ "is not of this world, and shall never be destroyed." The Almighty King

of Zion reigns *universally in* the world—*mediatorially* in his church—*spiritually* in the hearts of his people—and *eternally* in the glory of heaven, Heb. i, 8; Rom. xiv, 17; Matthew xxv, 34. His reign is infinitely wise, holy, just, merciful, and gracious. What a transcendently glorious and amiable Sovereign! Let us therefore consider,

II. THE EXALTED PRIVILEGE OF HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE;—"Unto him that loved us," &c. This inspired description of the nature and properties of Christian salvation, is highly appropriate and comprehensive; and distinctly specifies,

1. *The divinity of its origin;*—"Unto *him* that *loved us.*" God is unquestionably the source of all possible good, and from him every blessing descends. When he beheld the miserable and perishing state of mankind, he remembered us in infinite mercy, and graciously sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world, John iv, 9, 10. Jesus also loved us, and "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." What unspeakable love has he manifested to fallen sinners! Consider his amazing incarnation, sufferings, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the "right hand of the Majesty on high," 2 Cor. v, 14, 15, viii, 9. His love contains unfathomable breadths, and lengths, and depths, and heights, which neither angels nor men can perfectly comprehend! This spontaneous and unparalleled love is the originating cause of all the ineffable blessings of present and eternal salvation, Eph. ii, 4—6.

2. *The excellency of its character;*—"And *washed* us from *our sins.*" All sin is moral contamination. It not only contracts guilt, but also defiles every power both of body and soul. Hence it is called, "uncleanness, corruption, defilement, the pollution of the world, and filthiness of flesh and spirit," Mark vii, 21—23. From these stains of guilt and depravity Christ saves all his faithful followers. The work of grace is *already begun* in their hearts. Their iniquities are freely and fully forgiven, and they believingly participate the cleansing efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, 1 John i, 7. Present salvation therefore includes both the justification of our *persons*, through the righteousness of Christ, and the sanctification of our *nature* by the spirit of holiness, Jer. xxiii, 6; Titus iii, 5. Pardon and purity are *equally* necessary, and are *actually* enjoyed by those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and are saved "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. vi, 11; Tit. ii, 14.

3. *The efficacy of its medium;*—"And washed us in *his own*

blood." This is the only possible way in which sinners can be saved; "for without shedding of blood, there can be no remission." Every spiritual blessing is attributed to the blood of Christ. We are *redeemed*, *justified*, *adopted*, *washed*, and ultimately *glorified*, through "the *blood* of the everlasting covenant," Rom. iii, 24, 25; 1 Pet. i, 19; Rev. vii, 14. This medium of salvation was *typified* by the whole sacrificial dispensation of the Jews, which was a shadow of good things to come. But Jesus Christ has now *personally* "opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness," and saves his people not *ceremonially* by the blood of legal sacrifices, but *meritoriously* by his own "most precious blood," which was shed for them, Heb. xii, 14. This blood possesses not only an *atoning virtue*, for the expiation of sin, but also, a *cleansing efficacy*, which purifies the soul; for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all unrighteousness."

4. *The dignity of its subjects*;—"And hath made us *kings* and *priests* unto God and his Father." Divine grace both saves and dignifies its possessors; it raises them from the ruin and misery of sin, to a state of glory and virtue. They are anointed spiritual *kings*, having already received a kingdom of grace; and are the legitimate heirs of the kingdom of heaven, Col. i, 13; Heb. xii, 28. They are also consecrated *priests*, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." They receive this honour that cometh from God only, and participate all the inestimable dignities and privileges of the glorious gospel of peace, 1 Pet. ii, 9, 10. The believing recipients of salvation, are thus divinely honoured and blessed; and are made by the blood and Spirit of Christ, "a royal and holy priesthood unto God and his Father." Surely, "happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!" This will lead us to notice,

III. THE PERSONAL INFLUENCE OF REDEEMING GRACE;—"To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." This lively description of supreme majesty and power to the Redeemer, may be regarded as,

1. *The language of admiration and love.* The believer discovers inexpressible perfection and glory, in the person and character of the Saviour; and therefore regards him, as the object of his intense desire and devout attachment. A *personal* apprehension of his infinite grandeur and goodness deeply affects the minds of Christians, and fills them with unutterable raptures of wonder, love, and joy. The believing contemplation of his

divine glories, redeeming works, and saving offices, powerfully attracts and captivates their hearts, and triumphantly subdues them to the sceptre of his kingdom. They gladly embrace him as an object altogether lovely and glorious; readily acknowledge the supremacy of his glory and dominion; and joyfully "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord," Gal. vi, 14; 1 John iv, 19.

2. *The language of gratitude and praise.* A participation of the unsearchable riches of Christ is invariably accompanied with grateful and affectionate dispositions of the heart. The doctrine of salvation by grace necessarily excludes boasting, and inspires the profoundest gratitude and thanksgiving. Though the obligations of believers to the Redeemer are infinite and indescribable, they sensibly feel their overwhelming influence, and often gratefully exclaim, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits;" "Unto him that loved us," &c. Their unfeigned gratitude is *practically* displayed, by their love to the Saviour's person,—obedience to his word,—zeal in his cause,—praise for his goodness,—and joyful anticipation of his kingdom, Psa. cxvi, 12—14; 1 Pet. i, 8, 9.

3. *The language of adoration and delight.* Jesus Christ is inexpressibly glorious and precious to them that believe. He is their "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." He is the object of their confidence,—the author of their salvation,—and the source of their happiness; they exultingly glory in his cross,—devoutly honour him as they honour the Father,—supremely adore the perfections of his character,—and greatly delight in the exercises of his worship, Prov. iii, 17; Phil. iii, 3. The text is their triumphant felicity and song in the house of their pilgrimage; and will ultimately constitute the blissful theme of their ceaseless hallelujahs, in the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Let all the redeemed therefore, believingly and piously add, *Amen.*

This subject displays the exalted dignity of the Redeemer,—unfolds the nature and method of salvation,—and affords ample consolation to them, that "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

ETA.

END OF VOL. III.

SKETCHES OF SERMONS

PREACHED TO CONGREGATIONS

IN VARIOUS PARTS OF GREAT BRITAIN,

AND ON THE

EUROPEAN CONTINENT;

FURNISHED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE AUTHORS.

"So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."—*Nehemiah* viii, 8.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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I.—*God's Approbation of his Works.*

GENESIS i, 31.

"And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good."

NOTWITHSTANDING the oppressive load of labour, and care, and sorrow, and temptation, by which we are usually burdened, and the attention we are constrained to bestow on matters which concern food and raiment, and other supplies necessary for ourselves and our dependants, while passing through the present life; the vigorous and immortal mind sometimes disengages herself from her encumbrances, and spurning the low and grovelling pursuits in which she has been detained, plunges into the future; and either anxiously inquires, 'Through what variety of untried being, through what new scenes and changes must I pass?'—or expatiates on the bright and blissful prospects which revelation offers to the eye of faith, and anticipates the period when those prospects shall be realized.

Nor are such excursions confined to the future. Man's future destiny is closely connected with his past and present circumstances. It is therefore natural for us to desire to inform ourselves concerning that part of the history of our species which relates the most important events of former times. Here again revelation comes to our assistance; and in its sacred pages, and particularly in the chapter in which our text is found, carries us back, through a variety of most interesting occurrences, even to the birth of time itself. In this light our text appears to be of considerable consequence: for while it furnishes matter of history the most ancient and venerable, it asserts some important natural truths, and suggests by way of inference, several others of the moral kind. Let us consider,

I. THE NATURAL TRUTHS ASSERTED. Among these the text asserts,

1st. *The true origin of all things.* "And God saw every thing that *he had made.*" Of this, plain as it may now appear, it is highly probable we should have no conception, but for what the Bible has taught us; for although it may be easily demon-

strated, that matter cannot have created itself, yet it will not so easily follow, that it must have had a creator. We acquire our stock of ideas by experience; and a creation out of nothing is so different from all the experience of mankind, that some philosophers, as Aristotle and his followers, supposed the world to have been eternal; while others, as the Epicureans, conjectured that the matter, the atoms only of which it was composed, was eternal, and that they happened by chance to fall into their present form and order. And even to this day, the worshippers of Budhoo, perhaps the most numerous sect of idolaters in the world, though they acknowledge "*gods many*," have no notion of a Supreme Creator. "The world by wisdom knew not God." But the Scripture assures us, that the universe is the production of a Being, who is *infinitely free and powerful:* not overruled by a fatal necessity; but whose will is the *law*, as it was the *cause* of nature, verse 1; Psa. xxxiii, 9; Dan. iv, 35; James i, 18: who is *infinitely wise;* whence those works of design and arrangement we every where perceive, Psa. civ, 24, and even that intellect by which we are capable of the perception, and which is only a feeble emanation from the source of intelligence, Job xxxii, 8; Isa. xl, 28: who is *infinitely good;* not a mere intelligence, wise to design and powerful to execute, yet destitute of every thing like moral excellence, but ever respecting what is *right and holy;* and what is *good*, is *best* for his rational creatures. Agreeably to this, our text asserts,

2nd. *The original perfection of all things:*—"And God saw *every thing* that he had made, and behold it was *very good.*"

1. *It was very good, as being well adapted to answer its particular intention.* Instance the suitable instrumentality of the heavenly bodies in the diffusion of light; and the adaptation of the eye to receive, by means of that light, impressions of surrounding objects, ver. 14—17. Instance again, the correspondence between the structure of fishes and the waters in which they are to live; and between that of fowls and the lighter element in which they have to fly, ver. 20, 21; and, in short, we might instance all the numerous subjects of what are called astro and physico theology. In this sense it is said concerning the distribution of almost every day, "*It was good,*" v. 1, 10, 12, &c.

2. *It was very good, as being conducive to the perfection and welfare of the whole.* Here it may be necessary to distinguish between the world as it now is, and as it came out of its Maker's hands. All its glory, beauty, utility, &c, are *remaining* glory, &c,—all its deformity and disadvantages are superinduced. Sin

produced a most disastrous change both in the *constitution* and in the *residence* of man. At first there was nothing parched or dreary in the earth, pestilential or tempestuous in the air, scorching in the sun, ferocious in the animal tribes, &c, but the reverse of this. And man especially, was nobly *free*, *wise* as needful, *righteous*, and truly *holy;* Eph. iv, 24; Col. iii, 10. Hence,

3. *It was very good, as being well calculated to promote the glory of its Maker.* This was the design of the first, as well as of the *new* creation, Eph. iii, 10; Rev. iv, 11. And in the contemplation of themselves and the universe, God's rational offspring found abundant matter of wonder and praise, Job xxxviii, 7. Even now, in this state of disorder which sin has introduced, to minds rightly disposed, "the things that are made" powerfully declare "the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead," Psa. xix, 1; Rom. i, 20; and prompt the pious reflection,

> 'These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
> Almighty! thine this universal frame,
> Thus wondrous fair! thyself how wondrous then!'

We are, therefore, not surprised that the text asserts,

4. *God's approbation of his work.* He saw it "*very* good;" *superlatively* so. This is affirmed of "*every* thing that he had made." We do not say that all parts of the creation are equally *valuable;* see Matt. x, 29—31; yet God *approves* of what is *good* in its *place and nature;* approves as much of the "green herb" or the tuft of "grass," or even of the rock which furnishes moisture for its support, as of the "living creature" which feeds upon it. He is present to every part of his creation; sees the dependance of the parts on each other; and regards them accordingly. Man, in particular, possessed all the perfections consistent with his nature and his circumstances. And to object on the one hand, that he had better not have been blessed with liberty seeing he has abused it, is to say, in effect, that a mere machine is more excellent than an angel?—and on the other to ask, 'Why were not all men made angelic or superangelic beings?' is to propose a foolish question. In the case proposed, there would have been a different class of entities; but we, as men, should have had no existence at all. When any creature has all its powers and properties in perfection, then it is "very good." Such was creation; and such it was in its Maker's esteem. Let us hear,

II. THE MORAL TRUTHS SUGGESTED. Here we may observe,

1. Seeing that God had done for man the utmost that his case admitted, both as respected himself and as respected the world around him, the blessings of which were given him "richly to enjoy," it follows that *man was under the greatest obligations possible*, in his then present circumstances. He might, indeed, become more indebted for a *continuance* and *increase* of unmerited blessings. And *we* have the obligation of *redemption*, in addition to every other, 1 Cor. vi, 20. Hence,

2. *Sin is at once the vilest injustice and the basest ingratitude imaginable.* It is an unwarrantable appropriation of *time* and *talents*, and *property*, not our own but another's, and a foul abuse of favours conferred, to the disadvantage and grief of our best benefactor, Isa. i, 2; Mal. i, 6.

3. *A continuance in sin is the most daring imprudence.* According to that constitution of things which was "very good," holiness and happiness went together. Sin, by violating that constitution, 'brought death into the world, with all our wo.' It is an outrage on the principles of our nature; and the ardent flame might as soon cease to burn, as sin to produce misery. This is abundantly confirmed by the threatenings, Prov. xi, 21; 2 Thess. i, 7, 9;—the entreaties, Ezekiel, xviii, 30—32, and xxxiii, 11;—and even the promises of God's word, Isa. lv, 6, 7; Jer. iii, 12, 22.

4. *Reformation is well-pleasing to God.* He approved of things in their original state. He is unchangeable; and therefore must disapprove of the derangement which sin has occasioned: consequently a restoration to their former order must be highly acceptable in his sight. In proof of this, he has provided ample means of moral renovation.—His Son, John iii, 16; 1 John iii, 3.—His word, Psa. xix, 7—10; John xx, 31.—His ministers, 2 Cor. v, 18—20; Col. i, 25—28.—His Spirit, to convince, intercede, strengthen, comfort, &c, John xvi, 8; Rom. viii, 26; Luke xi, 13.

5. *The text suggests a lesson of humility.* "How is the gold become dim!" the divine image effaced! Humility becomes every rational creature, on account of its *debt* and its *dependance*. Unfallen intelligences feel it; much more should we. "The crown is fallen from our head: wo unto us that we have sinned!" Lam. v, 16; Dan. ix, 7. Yet,

6. *The text furnishes ground of hope and encouragement.* It proclaims the *goodness* of him with whom we have to do; and therefore encourages us to hope in his *mercy*. Let us remember, however, that it is to the gospel we are indebted for im-

proving hope into assurance, Rom. viii, 32. And while we cautiously avoid sin, the pest of happiness and the abhorrence of God, let us gratefully acknowledge, as our surest ground of hope, for grace here, and for "the blissful seat" hereafter, that

'T was great to speak a world from nought,
'T was *greater to redeem.*'

ZETA.

II.—*The Life and Death of Adam.*

GENESIS v, 5.

"And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years and he died."

IT is recorded in a certain periodical work, that a gay gentleman, on accidentally hearing this chapter read, perceived in it such a solemn lecture on the vanity of human life, and was so affected by it, as to become from that hour habitually serious, and concerned to prepare for a better world. To make a similar improvement of it is also our duty and wisdom; for whatsoever was written aforetime, was written for our instruction.

In all the characters mentioned in this chapter, we cannot but feel interested; for they are all our common progenitors. But in no one besides, are we so highly interested, as in that of Adam, whose life and death we find thus briefly narrated; "And all the days that Adam lived," &c. Very little indeed is here distinctly recorded, but much important instruction is hereby suggested. Under the divine blessing, let us endeavour to collect and apply this instruction by considering,

I. THE SUBJECT OF THIS BRIEF NARRATION. Adam, the first of men. Here it may be profitable to notice him most attentively,

1. *As a compound being*, formed of different component parts.—*Composed of matter, or earth, as to his body;* "And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground," Gen. ii, 7. This suggested his name, Adam, that is, "red earth," and it teaches us humility; for mortals in their best state are but earthen vessels. We are *composed* of earth; "All are of the dust," Eccles. iii, 20. We derive our *sustenance* from the earth; "The profit of the earth is for all," &c, Eccles. v, 9. And we are *returning* to the earth, Eccles. iii, 20, and xii, 7.—

Composed of pure spirit, called "*The breath of life*," *as to his soul*, Gen. ii, 7. This *distinguishes* us from *mere matter*, which is without perception, without volition, or the power of choice, and without the power of self-motion; all mere matter being unconscious and inert. It proves our superior *dignity* in the scale of existence, Job xxxv, 10, 11. And it teaches us that *God*, who is our *Author*, should be regarded as the proper *end* of all our actions and pursuits, Rom. ii, 36. It will afford us profitable instruction to notice Adam,

2. *As the common head of mankind;* both our *natural* and *moral* head.—He is our *natural head, or common parent;* for Adam must have been the father, as Eve was the mother of all living, Gen. iii, 20. This renders the *blood* of all mankind the same, Acts xvii, 26; and our *interests* the same; for all mankind are brethren. Being thus united, we should live in unity, Psa. cxxxiii, 1. "Behold how good," &c. The *commands* of God appear highly *rational*, Matt. xxii, 37—40; for God, who is the first cause and last end of the human race, ought to be loved supremely; and our neighbour, who partakes of the same nature with us, ought to be loved by us as ourselves. Hence also we perceive that *malevolence* is *unnatural* and devilish, Acts vii, 26; James iii, 15, 16; and that *pride*, arising from imaginary high descent, is *absurd:* for we are all the offspring of God, Acts xvii, 28.—*He was our moral head or representative.* He acted for us, and his conduct affected the state of all his posterity. Had he remained innocent, we should have been naturally pure in our minds, and not subject to mortality in our bodies. His sin entailed on us condemnation, depravity, misery, and death, Rom. v, 18, 19; Gen. iii, 17; Rom. v, 12. Hence, without designing any unkind reflection on Adam, we may notice him,

3. *As the chief of sinners.* This he evidently appears to have been,—from the *nature* of his first transgression: which implied rebellion, ingratitude, and self-desecration, in obeying Satan rather than God;—from its *consequences;* the certain destruction of himself and his posterity;—and from its *aggravations;* these arose from his perfect *happiness*, his perfect *knowledge* of his duty, interest, and danger, and his sufficient *ability* to withstand all temptations. This is observed, to prepare us for noticing him,

4. *As a subject of God's redeeming mercy.* This may be justly inferred,—from God's gracious *promise* of an all-sufficient *deliverer*, Gen. iii, 15;—from Adam's silent *resignation* to God's righteous sentence; in this he appeared to have felt like peni-

tents in succeeding ages, Psa. xxxiv, 9; Mic. vii, 9;—and from the practice of *piety* in his *family*, Gen. iv, 3, 4.—This inference greatly encourages all doubting penitents, 1 Tim. i, 15. We are all authorized to notice Adam,

5. *As a figure or type of Christ*, Rom. v, 14. This he is called, because;—as through Adam all were *condemned*, so through Christ all are *justified*, Rom. v, 18;—as through Adam all became subject to *death*, so through Christ all became *immortal*, 1 Cor. xv, 21, 22;—as through Adam all became *depraved*, so through Christ all may be *restored*, Tit. ii, 14. Having noticed this interesting person, let us consider,

II. His life; he lived nine hundred and thirty years. His life may be considered,

1. *In its origin*. This was *divine*, *being derived from God*, Luke iii, 38.—He could not *give himself* life; the supposition of this would be absurd, as it must imply his acting before he existed.—Mere *matter* could not *give* life; this is impossible, because it has not life in itself; and it cannot give what it has not.—Unerring *truth* ascribes man's life to *God*, as its *Author* and *Preserver*, Acts xvii, 25, 28; Job x, 12. This being the case, God therefore justly claims the service of our lives, Psa. xcv, 6—8. We may consider the life of Adam,

2. *In its progress, as singularly diversified*. This it certainly was;—for as *innocent*, he enjoyed *unmixed happiness*, without remorse or uneasy fear;—as *fallen*, he endured *unmixed misery*, without peace or hope;—as *restored*, he must have felt *misery* counteracted by divine *mercy*. Hence let us recollect *what our sins deserve*, with deep *humiliation*, Rom. vi, 23; Lam. iii, 23. What divine *grace* does for us; it renders all our allotments blessings, Rom. viii, 28. This should teach us *resignation*, John xviii, 11. What God *designs* for his people; even complete redemption from all evil, both moral and natural, Isa. xxxv, 10; Rev. xxi, 4. This we should recollect with *desire* and *hope*, Psa. lxxiii, 24. Consider Adam's life also,

3. *In its duration, as graciously protracted*. He lived nine hundred and thirty years.—*His* years were nearly the same length as *ours*, being composed at least of twelve months, of thirty days each. Compare Gen. vii, 11, 24, with Gen viii, 4.—His life was *graciously* protracted, that he might *recover* God's forfeited favour, Psa. xxxix, 13; that he might be a *witness* for God, of his goodness, justice, and mercy, Isa xliii, 12; that he might lead *others* to God, as he probably did Enoch, with

whom he lived three hundred and eight years; and that he might be *prepared* for excellent glory by serving plentifully, 2 Cor. ix, 6.—From the protracted life of Adam, learn the *great end* for which our lives are continued; that we may glorify God by getting and doing good. Earnestly pursue this end, Eccles. ix, 10. In so doing, consider,

III. His death; he died. His death may be considered,

1. *As a dissolution of first principles.* He died; he was not annihilated, but merely dissolved. His body returned to dust, his soul to God, Eccles. xii, 7. The nature of death should be contemplated by us, and duly influence our conduct. Remember your bodies are dust, returning to dust; do not idolize them, neither by adoring their comeliness, nor inordinately sacrificing to their appetites, Rom. xiii, 14; Phil. iii, 18, 19. Your souls are returning to God; prepare to meet him as your Judge, by promptly seeking his favour, Job xxii, 21. Consider his death,

2. *As the fruit of sin.* This also exposes you to death, Rom. vi, 21.—Be importunate therefore in seeking the utter *destruction* of *sin*, Hos. xiv, 1, 2.—Then rejoice in hopes of *complete redemption* by *Christ*, Phil. iii, 21. Adam's death may be considered,

3. *As a release from the vanity and evils of this world*, Rev. xiv, 13.—Sin renders all created enjoyments vain, Rom. viii, 20; Eccles. i, 1, 2.—Choose God for your portion in this life, Lam. iii, 24.—Then death will crown your highest wishes, Psalms lxxiii, 25, 26, and xvi, 11. The death of our first parent may be considered,

4. *As a certain indication of our own.* This it evidently is; for the sentence passed on him, affects us also, Gen. iii, 19; Heb. ix, 27.—Death is therefore highly *important*, because it places you before God as your judge, Heb. ix, 27.—Death is *certain*, for sentence is passed on you, Rom. viii, 10; it is *near*, Psa. xxxix, 4, 5; James v, 9. Attend therefore to the solemn admonitions of God's word, Matt. xxiv, 44; 1 Pet. iv, 7; 2 Pet. iii, 14.

Alphi.

III.—*An Interest in God the most effectual Antidote to Fear.*

GENESIS XV, 1.

"Fear not, Abram, I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward."

"THE LORD loveth the righteous." How demonstrable is this consolatory truth! He designates them by the most endearing titles. He confers upon them the most invaluable privileges. He permits them to hold with himself the closest communion. He manifests the most affectionate solicitude, to convince them of the deep interest he takes in their most minute affairs. God's conduct towards Abram abundantly illustrates the verity of these remarks.—The preceding chapter presents the first record of martial contest that has been transmitted to posterity; in which Lot, the nephew of Abram, and all his goods, had fallen into the hands of an unprincipled and ferocious soldiery. The tidings were conveyed to Abram, who most promptly armed his servants, amounting to three hundred and eighteen, and pursued after the conquerors; and, by a most judicious attack, succeeded in defeating them: and what to him was more desirable, in rescuing Lot, and his family, from their hands, and recovering all the spoils. "After these things, the word of the LORD came unto Abram, &c, saying, Fear not, Abram," &c. It would be natural for Abram, thus circumstanced, to fear lest the enemies whom he had routed should rally their forces, and by superior numbers overpower him; the text was therefore to him peculiarly appropriate. We will, in reflecting on it, consider,

I. THE PERSON ADDRESSED. Abram—a character rendered memorable for Faith—Prayer—Hospitality—and Obedience.

1. *Abram was a man of genuine faith.* The faith of Abram was *divine* in its object, "he believed God," Rom. iv, 3. *Unshaken* in its exercise, his faith was tried, Heb. xi, 17; but he staggered not, Rom. iv, 20. *Operative* in its principle, Heb. xi, 18. *Realizing* in its prospect, "he looked for a city," Heb. xi, 10. He is termed "faithful Abram."

2. *Of importunate prayer.* Witness the intercessions which he urged on behalf of Sodom. In these we perceive *feelings of profound self-abasement of soul*, "I am but dust and ashes."

Gen. xviii, 27. *Sympathies of deep commiseration.* He saw the terrible storm of indignation ready to burst on Sodom. *Appeals repeatedly urged on the Divine Being.* "I will speak yet but this once," Gen. xviii, 32. But *principles of perfect submission.* Not a murmur of discontent is heard.

3. *Of cordial hospitality.* See Gen. xviii, 2—7. Kindness to strangers is highly commendable. The accommodations now provided for travellers were in the days of Abram unknown: but even in the apostolic age hospitality was deemed a praiseworthy virtue, Rom. xii, 13; Heb. xiii, 2; 1 Pet. iv, 9.

4. *Of uniform obedience.* His personal piety secured to him the high encomium of a "Friend of God." In reference to his domestic arrangements, the Lord declared, "I know him that he will command his children," &c, Gen. xviii, 19. And as to his general character, by works was his faith made perfect. James ii, 22.

II. THE ADMONITORY PROHIBITION URGED. "Fear not, Abram." This prohibition cannot be designed to suppress the passion of fear; a passion common to human nature, and in our present state as necessary as it is common. Nor was it intended to divest Abram of that cautionary mode of conduct, which provides for safety in the time of danger. Much less are we to imagine that the prohibition includes that holy, reverential awe of the Divine Being, which should be deeply fixed in our minds, Prov. xxiii, 17, xxviii, 14. But the fear prohibited is the apprehension of evil, attended with that uneasiness, anxiety, and torment, which are its usual concomitants.

1. *There is a fear of persecution.* The revilings of men, and the fines, penalties, and punishments which have been inflicted upon the righteous in various ages, have produced in their minds feelings of deep anxiety. Our Lord sought to arm his disciples against this kind of fear, Luke xii, 4. God said to Abram, "Fear not."

2. *There is a fear of poverty.* The disciples of Christ are chiefly "the poor of this world," James ii, 5. Want often stares them in the face, and their fears are frequently excited, lest they should be deprived of the bread that perisheth, see Luke xii, 22—30. How far Abram was subject to this fear it is impossible to determine. In the early periods of the world commerce was unknown—the luxuries of life were few—famines were frequent, and want prevailed to an alarming degree. Abram sojourned in a strange land, and might have been deprived of the common necessaries of life.

3. *There is the fear of pain.* Suffering is man's inevitable lot. The human body in its tendency to dissolution necessarily suffers, and where is the individual that has not indulged a painful presentiment in reference to the pain of dying? God said to Abram, "Fear not," Rev. ii, 10.

III. THE ENCOURAGING ASSURANCE ANNEXED. "I am thy shield," &c. This was designed as an antidote to fear. The shield anciently was a piece of defensive armour, usually composed of wood covered with leather, sometimes overlaid with plates of gold or brass.—The use of the shield was to defend the body against the darts of the enemy. God was Abram's defence, and he has been the defence of his people in all ages.

1. *He defends their persons.* Their *bodies.*—See Daniel in the den of lions; the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace; Paul when suffering shipwreck. Their *souls* in temptation.—"There hath no temptation taken you," &c, 1 Cor. x, 13; 2 Pet. ii, 9. From the power of evil.—"The Lord shall preserve thee from evil," Psa. cxxi, 7; John xvii, 15.

2. *He protects their substance.* "Hast thou not made a hedge about him?" &c, Job i, 10; "There shall no evil befall thee," &c, Psa. xci, 10. If God be our shield, our defence is *certain;* "The Almighty shall be thy defence," &c, Job xxii, 25; "My defence is of God," Psa. vii, 19, lix, 9. Our defence is *universal.*—The shields of the people defended one part of the body only. God defends his people as the hen doth her brood, Luke xiii, 34. "He shall cover thee with his feathers," Psa. xci, 4. *Constant.*—The earthly warrior may be divested of his shield; God will never leave his people. "He that keepeth Israel," &c, Psa. cxxi, 4.

3. *God is the reward of his people.* The king of Sodom had offered Abram rewards for interposing in his behalf; these he had rejected, saying that he would not even take a thread, Gen. xiv, 23. But God promises Abram that *he* will be his reward; *He is the author of his people's reward.* Their reward is not wages for service performed; but recompense freely and graciously given; infinitely surpassing all their claims, on the ground of any supposed worthiness; *He is the giver of their reward;* "the rewarder of them," &c, Heb. xi, 6. He appoints their kingdom, gives them their crown, places them on their throne, &c, Luke xxii, 29; Rev. ii, 10, iii, 21. *He is the object of their reward.* It is not their wonderful escape from perdition, nor the splendour of heaven, nor the society of angels, that will constitute their reward; but it is the possession of

God, the light of his countenance, the consciousness of his love, and the enjoyment of his nature; hence God is their portion and their heritage, and they are heirs of God. He is their *exceeding* great reward; exceeding all earthly rewards, in the dignity of its origin—the vastness of its nature—the certainty of its communication—the felicity of its possession—and the perpetuity of its existence.

From the subject we learn,

1. *The security and safety of God's people.* God is their shield: they live in a world of enemies, and are surrounded by dangers, seen and unseen; but "the name of the LORD is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

2. *Their tranquillity and happiness.* God is their reward: perhaps they have little to expect in this world but painful exercises; but their all is treasured up in God; and from his bounty and benevolence they cannot expect too much.

3. *The fearless confidence with which they should be inspired.* What can they fear, while God is their *shield* and their *exceeding great reward?* shall they fear tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? "Nay, in all these things *they* are more than conquerors through him that hath loved *them*."

BETA.

IV.—*The Trial of Abraham.*

GENESIS xxii, 15—18.

"And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn," &c.

THE dispensations of divine Providence very frequently assume a mysterious character, and short-sighted man is constrained, with humility, to acknowledge that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the ways of God higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts. But while he thus 'hath his way in the whirlwind, and in the storm,' we have the most express assurance, that he "is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works." Hence the righteous man, under all his trials and painful exercises, has the consoling reflection, that as the whole concatenation of events is under the superintendency of infinite wisdom, nothing can possibly

come upon him that is incompatible with the love and beneficence of Jehovah. And though he may be totally ignorant of the designs of God, in the various afflictive events which transpire, yet confiding in the wisdom and equity of the divine government, he steadily proceeds in the path of duty, and ultimately realizes the blessings consequent upon strong faith and prompt obedience. These sentiments are strikingly exemplified in the life of the patriarch Abraham; and especially in that part of it with which the words of our text stand immediately connected. It contains an interesting description of the conduct of the "friend of God," under a most trying and afflictive exercise in which he had to engage. In discussing this subject we shall consider,

I. THE PATRIARCH'S PAINFUL TRIAL.

II. HIS EXEMPLARY CONDUCT UNDER IT.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF WHICH IT IS PRODUCTIVE.

IV. THE INSTRUCTIVE TENDENCY OF THE WHOLE.

I. THE PATRIARCH'S PAINFUL TRIAL. Abraham, "the father of the faithful," was long destitute of children: but the Lord answered his prayer, and fulfilled his desire, by giving him a son in his old age. Isaac, the child of promise, became the principal object of Abraham's subordinate affection—

'Less beloved than God alone.'

Whilst he was thus the subject of fond paternal feeling, Abraham was commanded to offer his beloved Isaac in sacrifice to God, from whom he had received him.

The subject of requisition, and *the prescribed manner of compliance*, equally describe the afflictive nature of the trial with which he was exercised.

1. *The subject of requisition.* "Take now *thy son*, thine *only* son Isaac, *whom thou lovest*," ver. 2. The Lord did not require the patriarch's flocks, nor his herds, nor his gold, nor his silver, but Isaac, "the son of his old age, his only son." The fond father would doubtless have parted with any thing, yea, with his all, so that the son of his love might be spared. Oh! what secret anguish must have wrung his heart, when the divine will was at first announced. The Lord designed to exhibit a monument of strong faith and prompt obedience to succeeding generations.

2. *The prescribed manner of compliance.* Had the Supreme Being required Isaac to be secluded from the secular concerns of life, and devoted to the priestly office, the patriarch's heart would probably have been elated with joy; but instead of this,

he was required to present his son as a sacrificial victim! and to immolate him with his own hands! How distressing the idea! how repugnant to the dictates of parental affection!

Various objections might present themselves in opposition to this painful requirement; such as, its apparent inconsistency with the perfections of Jehovah;—its decided opposition to a law previously promulgated, Gen. ix, 5, 6;—its seeming incongruity with the covenant which God had made, Gen. xvii, 16, 19;—it would constitute him a monster of cruelty in the eyes of the surrounding nations;—and in addition to the whole, no reason had been assigned for this extraordinary requirement. Notwithstanding these plausible objections, mark,

II. THE PATRIARCH'S EXEMPLARY CONDUCT. We shall notice,

1. *The promptness of his obedience.* The nature of the engagement which he was called to perform was such, that we could readily excuse hesitancy and delay; but Abraham made haste to keep the commandments of God. "He rose early in the morning." Being assured that the requisition was from God, he did not, by a course of procrastination, put off the heart-rending exercise to some distant period. That which God commands ought to be performed immediately, Eccles. ix, 10.

2. *The prudence of his measures.* He not only set about obeying the commands of God immediately, but also prudently adapted his measures to his circumstances. He appears to have maintained a perfect calmness of mind through the whole of the trying scene. He cautiously avoided every thing which was likely to impede his progress in the path of obedience. He gave no intimation to Sarah, to the servants, or even to Isaac himself, of the particular purpose of their journey; being persuaded that this would have produced very serious hindrances to the performance of his duty. He also made every necessary provision for the painful exercise in which he was called to engage; the wood, the fire, and the knife, were all prepared. The anguish of parental affection did not produce that perturbation of mind which is inimical to the exercise of prudence.

3. *His inflexible perseverance.* The venerable patriarch did not commence a course of obedience, and then, after re-considering the affair, recede from his purpose; but having begun his journey, he travelled on from day to day;—prudently left his servants at a distance from the scene of action;—calmly answered Isaac's affecting interrogation, ver. 7, 8;—reared his rural altar;—laid the wood in order;—bound his son, and took

the knife; in short did all but strike the fatal blow. Abraham's *faith*—his *resignation*—and his *obedience*, claim our highest admiration, and ought to stimulate us to constant holy emulation.

III. The blessings of which it was productive. The trials of the righteous are beneficent in their design; they are intended to produce real benefit to those who are exercised thereby, Job xxiii, 10; Zech. xiii, 9; Heb. xii, 11. This was strikingly exemplified in the patriarch's trial.

1. *Isaac was spared.* Whilst the patriarch's uplifted hand furnished the strongest proof of his love to God, and his resignation to his will, the anguish of heart, which the streaming blood of his son would doubtless have occasioned, was superseded by the gladdening prohibition which he received, ver. 11, 12. Obedience and resignation, in the time of trial, are generally crowned with deliverance, 1 Cor. x, 13.

2. *A testimony of divine approbation was experienced.* Abraham, doubtless, had the testimony of a good conscience, he was satisfied that what he had done was right: and his God declared himself to be satisfied with his servant, ver. 12. Although the proposed victim was spared, yet the journey was not undertaken in vain: for a substitute was found, the patriarch's faith was tried, and a blessing conferred upon him.

3. *A gracious repetition of promise was received.* The Lord had before promised to bless Abraham, Gen. xii, 2, 3; and here the promise is repeated and amplified.—*A numerous progeny*, which in those days was considered one of the greatest blessings that could be conferred upon man.—*Triumph over his enemies*, possessing their cities, and executing judgment upon them.—*Giving birth to the Saviour of the world*, "In thy seed," &c. The application of this part of the promise to Jesus Christ has been rendered unquestionable, by the use which the apostle Paul has made of it, Gal. iii, 14, 16, 18. Jesus Christ was of the seed of Abraham, and as he became a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; he is a blessing of such amazing worth, that the human mind cannot estimate it, nor can mortal tongue express its value.

IV. The instructive tendency of the whole. History is generally instructive; this is especially the case with patriarchal history; and this incident in particular suggests some very instructive reflections.

1. *The will of God revealed to man is a sufficient reason for prompt obedience.* Antichristian philosophers, and infidel ca-

villers, may produce their pompous sophisms, but the will of God will be ever consistent with the fitness of things, though every man may not comprehend it. When God commands, the duty of man is to obey, and not to cavil.

2. *Our greatest earthly blessings may be productive of very painful exercises.* Isaac was probably estimated more highly by the patriarch than any earthly good he possessed besides: and yet the most painful trial of his life was connected with Isaac.

3. *Severe trials are strictly consistent with the enjoyment of divine favour.* Many good men have been greatly distressed by deducing wrong conclusions from the afflictive dispensations of Providence with which they have been exercised. Abraham was the friend of God, and yet who was ever more acutely tried? Prov. iii, 11, 12; Heb. xii, 6—8.

4. *A lively faith in God manifests itself by a regular course of cheerful obedience.* Orthodoxy of sentiment, a clamorous zeal for opinion, and all the pomp of profession, may exist without a true and Scriptural faith in God being experienced; but Abraham's "faith wrought," and produced universal obedience. John xiv, 15, xv, 14; James ii, 17—26.

OMICRON.

V.—*Jacob's Dying Confidence.*

GENESIS xlix, 18.

"I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

THE history of the patriarch Jacob is well known, and forms a very important and interesting portion of sacred biography. It is replete with admonitory caution and consolatory encouragements, which are highly profitable for the instruction and comfort of the saints. In the early part of his life, he was favoured with the religious tuition and example of his eminently pious father, whose distinguished character is stamped with immortal renown in the imperishable annals of revelation. But notwithstanding the many advantages which he enjoyed in his youth, he did not on some occasions maintain that strict integrity of conduct, which is according to godliness. Yet it is evident, from the general aspect of his deportment, that he

was deeply imbued with the spirit of holiness, and piously devoted to the God of his fathers. He firmly believed in the promised Messiah, and was repeatedly privileged with special tokens of the divine mercy and approbation. This chapter records the closing scene of his protracted life and labours, and contains his dying requests and solemn charges to his children, intermixed with various predictions of the future events connected with the twelve tribes of his family. And in the midst of his departing advices and devotions, he exclaimed in the text, with holy confidence and joy, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Thus this venerable patriarch commended his soul into the hand of his covenant God, in sure and certain hope of a blissful immortality beyond the grave. In attempting an improvement of his dying appeal, we shall notice,

I. THE IMPORTANT OBJECT FOR WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAITED—"Thy *salvation*." Some suppose that Jacob refers merely to *temporal* deliverances, but it is much more probable that he desired the *complete* salvation of his soul, through the Divine Shiloh; which includes all the blessings of grace here, and of glory hereafter. In this general and extended sense of the term, salvation may be considered as only commenced in a state of probation, and perfected in the world of retribution.

1. *Salvation is present in its commencement.* It is the work of grace already begun in them that believe. It is not only a *future portion* joyfully anticipated, but also a *present privilege* actually enjoyed. The Lord *now* personally saves his people from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin, Eph. i, 7; Rom. vi, 14; Titus iii, 5;—from the curse and condemnation of the law, Rom. viii, 18; Gal. iii, 13;—from the tyranny and kingdom of Satan, Acts xxvi, 18; Col. i, 13;—from all their malicious and powerful enemies, and under every affliction and calamity of human life, Isa. liv, 17; 2 Cor. xii, 9. This salvation is progressive in its character, and admits of continual increase in Christian knowledge, purity, and happiness. But this glorious state of grace is only the *beginning* and *pledge* of its final perfection.

2. *Salvation is future in its consummation.* Though the righteous are now initially saved from *moral* evil, and participate "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," yet they are not actually delivered from *natural* evil while in a probationary state. In the present world they are always surrounded with enemies, exposed to dangers, and subject to complicated trials. Here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come. "There

remaineth a rest to the people of God." He saved them through every period of their mortal existence; in the dark valley of the shadow of death; and in the great day of his wrath, when he shall come "to make up his jewels," Heb. ix, 28; Col. iii, 3, 4. Their bodies also shall be changed and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and with their immortal spirits shall be *fully* and *eternally* saved from sin and all its direful consequences, to the perfect and endless fruition of the Deity, in whose "presence there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore," Rom. ii, 7. Such was the comprehensive and dignified object of Jacob's pious anticipation; and the source from whence he expected to derive it will appear by considering,

II. THE GLORIOUS BEING IN WHOM THE PATRIARCH CONFIDED—"*Thy* salvation, O *Lord*." He did not trust in the virtues of his ancestors, nor expect salvation on the ground of his descent from Abraham, "the father of the faithful." He exercised implicit confidence in the Lord Jehovah, as the origin and donor of every blessing. He knew that salvation was solely a divine achievement, and therefore emphatically called it, "*Thy* salvation, O *Lord*."

1. *Salvation is divinely devised and provided.* When we had destroyed ourselves, in God was found our help. He piteously beheld our perishing condition, as depraved and guilty sinners, and in infinite wisdom and mercy devised a glorious scheme of reconciliation through the intervention of a Divine Mediator, 1 Tim. ii, 5, 6. By the actual accomplishment of his scheme of redemption, the perfections of the Creator are glorified—the moral law is practically magnified—a perfect atonement is made for sin—and eternal salvation is amply provided in Jesus Christ, for "the world that lieth in wickedness," John iii, 16; Acts v, 31; 1 Tim. i, 15. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!"

2. *Salvation is divinely revealed and promised.* It was primarily announced to our original progenitors in paradise, and was subsequently made known to the patriarchs and prophets, but is now more fully brought to light by the superior dispensation of "grace and truth," Col. i, 26—28. And it is not only explicitly revealed for our instruction, but is also graciously promised for our encouragement. The Lord faithfully engages to bestow every blessing of the covenant of grace on them who "unfeignedly repent, and believe his holy gospel," Isa. lv, 6, 7; Matt. xi, 28, 29; Acts xvi, 31. And all the divine promises are exceeding great and precious in their nature and effects, and infal-

libly certain in their authority and fulfilment. God is not slack concerning his promise, for his word is true from the beginning. 2 Cor. i, 20.

3. *Salvation is divinely imparted and realized.* Omnipotence alone is adequate to save the soul from sin and ruin. All human efforts, however wise and salutary, are totally inefficient and hopeless, 2 Cor. iii, 5.—But the infinite Jehovah is both able and willing to redeem us from all our iniquities.—He can enlighten the darkest mind—pardon the most aggravated guilt,—renovate the hardest heart—and save to the uttermost all them that believe in his name. He is the only *Author* and *Finisher* of the salvation of his people, and from him every good and perfect gift freely descends, Eph. ii, 8, 9. He begins and completes the work of righteousness; and it will ever remain an important and consoling truth, that "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." In him therefore, like Jacob, we should put our trust, and patiently expect his saving grace. And for our direction and encouragement, the text specifies,

III. THE SACRED EXERCISE IN WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAS OCCUPIED. "*I have waited* for thy salvation," &c. This language expresses the gracious state of mind in which this excellent saint both lived and died. He long waited for salvation according to the will of God, and was not disappointed. Let us therefore follow his pious example.

1. *We must wait for salvation patiently.* We have all gone astray from God "like lost sheep;" and have incurred his righteous displeasure. We are condemned by his law, and obnoxious to his wrath; but if we return unto him with penitent and obedient hearts, he will have mercy upon us, and abundantly pardon our sins, Luke xv, 20—24. Thus Jacob humbled himself before his God, and devoutly acknowledged that he was "less than the least of all his mercies," chap. xxxii, 10.—Genuine repentance is invariably necessary to obtain salvation, and it is only by thus *seeking* and *waiting* for it, that we participate its personal benefits, Hosea xiv, 1, 2, 4.—"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

2. *We must wait for salvation believingly.* This is the only way of obtaining an interest in the Redeemer.—Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Jacob's faith was strong and vigorous, by which he fully credited the divine declarations, and gladly embraced the promised Saviour. Genuine faith is unchangeably the same, and is essentially con-

nected with the salvation of our souls, John iii, 18, 36. It is a principle of *credence*, *affiance*, and *appropriation*. It is not a mere *opinion* of uncertain speculation, but an *habitual* and *vital* exercise of the mind, by which we are enabled confidently to exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

3. *We must wait for salvation importunately.* This primitive patriarch was an eminently devout character. A remarkable instance of this appears when he wrestled with the Lord, and nobly declared, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;" and as a mighty prince "he had power with God and prevailed."—Prayer is still indispensably necessary, and uniformly attended with certain success, Psalm xci, 15, 16. It must be sincere, humble, spiritual, fervent, and faithful. By thus *waiting upon* and *for* the Lord, he will assuredly hear our cries, and save us from all our troubles, Psa. xl, 1—3, l, 15.

4. *We must wait for salvation perseveringly.* It must be a patient, continual, and confident expectation of divine mercy, in all the appointed means of grace, and under every vicissitude of human life.—Thus good old Israel, after waiting for the Lord through a long series of years, and having found him a never-failing refuge and portion, he was at last enabled to die triumphantly in the faith, by which he had previously lived, joyfully declaring, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."—"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

We may learn from this subject the necessity of seeking salvation—the excellency of genuine religion—and the blessedness of "dying in the Lord."

ETA.

VI.—*Moses' serious and affectionate Charge to Israel.*

DEUTERONOMY vi, 3.

"Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it, that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey."

THE observation is as true as trite, that "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Nor are the troubles to which we are naturally exposed, and which we must necessarily bear, such as bodily disorder, family affliction, losses, crosses, temptations, &c, either few or small. Yet we often very much and very needlessly add to both their weight and number by our discontent and repining. On the other hand, we have it in our power naturally to qualify life's numerous ills, by looking at the bright side of our affairs, and by considering that our circumstances are better than we deserve, and better than those through which many, more deserving than ourselves, have been called by Divine Providence to pass. You may indeed be often grieved on account of the stupidity and carelessness, and folly of those around you; yet remember that no new thing has happened unto you. Moses had to encounter dispositions equally untoward: and hence we find him obliged to *remind* the Israelites of what they had previously been taught; and to charge them over and over, "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do," &c. In this passage we remark,

I. A SOLEMN CHARGE GIVEN. "*Hear—observe—do*"—the word of God; see ver. 1 and 2. The charge is,

1. *Hear* the word of the Lord. In different ages of the world, God's general method of instructing and reforming mankind has been the same. He has made man his organ of communication to man. He who *spake* by Enoch and Noah, "spake also at sundry times and in divers manners by succeeding prophets," and, afterwards by "his Son," and by "those who heard him." And notwithstanding his will, thus revealed, is permanently recorded in the Bible, that record is intended, not to supersede a living ministry, but to support and direct it. "It pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe;" and still the command is "*Preach the gospel* to every

creature;" see Matt. xxviii, 19, 20; consequently God's message to men in general is, "HEAR, and your soul shall live." This message, however, is neglected or abused: 1. By those who seldom or never attend a place of public worship:—let such consider how they will be able to account for their negligence, Heb. ii, 1—3; 2. By those who visit places of worship, but who *sleep* when they should *hear*, Rev. iii, 14—19; and, 3. By those who are usually engaged in worldly contemplations, plans, &c, while under the sound of the word, Amos viii, 5. Hence the charge is,

2. *Observe* the word of the Lord. Observe, 1. *The doctrinal truths taught*—respecting *God's claim on us*:—on this subject Moses in addressing Israel, employs all the preceding chapters of this book; and God has claims on US also, as our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, &c;—respecting *our obligation* to obedience, from gratitude, fear, hope, &c. Observe, therefore, 2. *The preceptive part of what is taught*;—concerning both outward and inward obedience, and to discrepancy between our conduct and spirit and the extensive requirements of the holy law, Mark xii, 30, 31. This will serve to show us our vileness, and prepare us to observe, 3. *The promissory and encouraging part of what is taught*;—respecting the freeness and plenitude of divine grace, to pity and pardon our transgressions, Isa. i, 18;—to purify our hearts, Ezek. xxxvi, 25–27;—and to help our infirmities, Isa. xli, 10; Heb. iv, 14—16. The observance required is, however, principally in reference to *practice*. Therefore, the charge is,

3. *Obey* the word of the Lord. "Observe to *do it*." This refers to what, in ver. 1, Moses called "the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded." And from this injunction, we may learn that the commandments, &c, are always the same in spirit and substance, and intended to mark the line of man's proper and requisite performance. Part of those statutes are *monitory*, and respect man simply as a creature capable of moral obedience: chapter v, 7—21. Another part are *laudatory*, and respect him as an *indebted creature*, who should suitably acknowledge his Benefactor, Lev. xxiii, 9—14; Heb. xiii, 15. Another part are *deprecatory*, and suited to man's condition, as he is as a *sinful creature*, Lev. i, 4, xvi, 3—16, xxiii, 27, 28, &c. In *these* last-mentioned services there was *confession* of sin and guilt;—so must *we confess*; *petition* for pardon; so must *we pray*:—holy *resolution* and *amendment*; so should *we resolve* and *reform*, in

the strength of grace derived through *our* great atonement, &c, Heb. xii, 21. In the text we have,

II. IMPORTANT BENEFITS PROPOSED. As a stimulus to the Israelites, to devote themselves to the service of Jehovah, Moses proposes,

1. *Their safety;* their well being;—that it may be *well* with thee. By way of contrast, look at ch. iv, 23, 26, xxvii, 26, and xxviii, 16—20. Disobedience always exposed to danger, to destruction. What could an Israelite do who had brought himself under those curses? what but flee to the appointed atonement? and what can we do, but flee to the great antitype? Heb. ix, 11, 12. "He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God *abideth* on him." But "say ye to the righteous" —the obedient believer—"it shall be *well* with him." He shall be *well instructed*, Psa. xxv, 9; 1 John ii, 20; *well defended*, Deut. xxxii, 9—11; *well provided*, Psalm xxxiv, 10; Phil. iv, 19. It shall be well with such, not only through life, but also at death, Psa. cxvi, 15;—at judgment, Matt. xxv, 34; 2 Thess. i, 10;—and for ever, Psa. xvi, 11. But we must return to observe, that Moses proposes,

2. *Their prosperity:*—"that ye may *increase mightily.*" This may have respect, 1. To an increase of *wealth*,—"houses full of all good things," &c, ver. 11; or, 2. To an increase of *numbers*, as chap. vii, 13. In the former case, they would have an increase of their means of enjoyment; in the latter, they would more "mightily" resist, repel, and overcome their enemies, chap. vii, 24; and in both they might with less difficulty and greater cheerfulness attend on the services of the Most High. We, as Christians, may expect prosperity of a higher order. 1. *Individually*, we may be blessed with a sense of pardoning love, and fellowship with God through his Son, 1 John i, 3;—may be enriched with the fruits of the Divine Spirit; "love, joy, peace," &c, Gal. v, 22, 23; strengthened with "might in the inner man," Eph. iii, 16; and continue to "grow in grace," &c, 2 Pet. iii, 18. Hence we shall be able to bear temptation more easily; and in our conflicts with Satan and his servants, our having prospered "mightily" will appear in our effectual resistance, and our final triumph. And hence, 2. While the members of churches adorn their profession, we may hope that the churches *collectively* will receive an accession of members, who, won by our Christian deportment, shall glorify God on our behalf, and, receiving an increase of strength, with additional numbers, the followers of Jesus will appear "fair as the moon, clear as the

sun, and terrible as an army with banners." But Moses proposed to the Israelites their mighty prosperity in,

3. *The possession of Canaan;* here characterized as a *good land*—and a *promised land.* "As the LORD God of thy fathers hath *promised* thee, in the land that *floweth with milk and honey.*" This land, valuable for its own sake, but much more so for the sake of the Promiser, should be regarded by us as emblematical of that "rest that remaineth,"—of "the better country, which is a heavenly." The latter, as well as the former, is a *promised* country; and it is promised by Him, who in respect of Canaan, proved his faithfulness, by fulfilling to the children the "promise made to their fathers." Hence we may rely on his word. The earthly Canaan afforded chiefly bodily delights; the heavenly Canaan furnishes spiritual felicity, Heb. xii, 22—24. That land was polluted by sin and sorrow, from which the better country is free, Rev. xxi, 4, 27. There the happiness was *partial*, here 't is *perfect;* in the one case *temporary*, in the other *everlasting*, Rev. vii, 16, 17, xxii, 3—5.

APPLICATION.

We have had many opportunities of hearing the word of truth. Have we heard with intention—attention—retention? Remembering what we hear, do we also reduce it to practice? Mark the language of Jesus, Matt. vii, 24, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them," &c; and that of the apostle, Rev. xxii, 14. Let the unhappy doom of the Israelites, who came short of the promised land, warn us against the unbelief and disobedience through which they fell in the wilderness, Deut. i, 32—35; Heb. iv, 1. And let the goodness of the heavenly country, and the faithfulness of our Almighty friend, induce us to "be not slothful; but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

ZETA.

VII.—*The Circumcision of the Heart.*

DEUTERONOMY XXX, 6.

"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

GENUINE religion, like its immutable Author, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Under every gradation of the dispensation of grace it has continued essentially the same in its origin, properties, and effects. The personal piety of the patriarchs and prophets was perfectly similar in its nature and tendency to that which is now inculcated in the gospel of Christ. This invariable identity of religion is fully proved, by the universal suffrage of Scripture, and the indubitable evidence of Christian experience. In what therefore it consists, and the means which lead to its possession, are subjects of supreme and general importance. Nor are we left to wander in the uncertain conjectures and perplexing labyrinths of reason and philosophy, in the grand pursuit of happiness. God has given us an explicit revelation of his will, which is an infallible directory for our instruction in righteousness. And though there is an admirable diversity of *illustration*, there is evidently a perfect unity of *design* throughout the sacred writings, in which godliness is uniformly represented as a Divine operation, hallowing all the powers of the soul, and securing the inestimable blessings of life and peace. Such is certainly the character and import of the text, wherein Moses encourages the children of Israel to repent and seek the Lord, by assuring them of divine mercy and salvation;—"And the Lord thy God," &c. These words contain a sublime description of true religion, and distinctly specify—the purity of its character—the excellency of its principle—and the felicity of its subjects. Observe,

I. THE PURITY OF ITS CHARACTER;—"The Lord thy God will *circumcise thine heart*," &c. Circumcision was originally instituted to ratify the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham his faithful servant, Gen. xvii, 10, 11.—It subsequently became a distinguishing and standing rite in the Jewish church. It was an *outward* and typical sign of an *internal* and spiritual

grace.—Hence we read of "the circumcision of the *flesh* made with hands," and also of "the *heart*, made without hands," by Jesus Christ. Circumcision therefore of the heart implies,

1. *The renovation of its moral powers.* Human nature is totally depraved, and every man's heart is "desperately wicked." Hence we must be spiritually circumcised and made holy, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, Heb. xii, 14.—This inward circumcision includes a deliverance from the power and pollution of sin, and an actual participation of the divine nature. The ancient rite, as used under the law, was a *seal* of the divine covenant—a *badge* of religious distinction—and a *moral* obligation to obedience, Eph. ii, 11; Gal. v, 3.—All the *real* and permanent advantages, originally designed by the ceremonial circumcision of the Jews, are *personally* realized in the believer's baptism of the Holy Ghost; which is the spiritual circumcision, "that is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, by the circumcision of Christ," Rom. ii, 28, 29; Col. ii, 11, 12.—Thus Judaism is perfected in Christianity, and the humble Christian is made to triumph over the boasting Jew, Phil. iii, 3.—The circumcision of the heart is,

2. *The special result of Divine operation;*—"The *Lord thy God* will, &c, and the heart of thy seed," who shall believe in his name. He only is able to achieve this great and glorious change. Is any thing too hard for Omnipotence? He can fully conquer and subdue the human heart, however obstinate and perverse; and perfectly renew his people in "righteousness and true holiness."—He faithfully promises his mercy and grace to the truly penitent, and will "receive them graciously, love them freely, and heal all their backslidings," Hosea xiv, 4; Ezek. xxxvi, 25–28.—The Lord accomplishes this work of salvation *meritoriously*, by Jesus Christ;—*instrumentally* by his word;—and *efficiently* by his Spirit, 1 John i, 9; 1 Pet. i, 23; Tit. iii, 5.—This personal renovation, or *spiritual* circumcision of the heart, is essentially necessary to our happiness, and must be earnestly sought by faith in the Redeemer, and fervent prayer to the God of all grace, Psa. li, 10; Acts xv, 9; Gal. vi, 15.—The representation of religion in the text also displays,

II. THE EXCELLENCY OF ITS PRINCIPLE;—"To *love* the Lord thy God," &c. Purity of heart is invariably accompanied with the principle of Divine love. When grace becomes predominant, it sways the whole empire of the soul, and reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. It destroys the evil roots of bitterness, and replenishes the believer with every holy principle

and heavenly disposition. Thus God renovates and saves his people, that they may love him with perfect hearts, and serve him with willing minds. This is the leading sentiment of the text, in which we discover,

1. *The object which the believer's love embraces;*—"The Lord thy God." There is every thing great and glorious in the Deity, to excite our supreme affection. He is altogether lovely in himself, and is the source of all possible good to his creatures. *His essential character demands our love.* He is *the Lord*, the uncreated, infinite, and eternal Jehovah. A God of unbounded perfection and glory; pervading all space, and dwelling in all duration;—the greatest, the wisest, and the best of all beings;—the sovereign Ruler of the universe;—"The King of kings, and the Lord of lords," whose kingdom shall never be destroyed, 1 Tim. i, 17.—*His relative character also demands our love.* He is *thy God;* not only thy Creator, Legislator, and Benefactor; but also thy Redeemer, Saviour, and Portion.—Thine by innumerable obligations, relations, and endearments: by right, by purchase, by covenant, by adoption, by enjoyment, by profession, and by anticipation.—Lo, this God is our God, and surely it is our reasonable service, and bounden duty, "to love him who first loved us," Matt. xxii, 37, 38; 1 Cor. xvi, 22.

2. *The degree to which the believer's love extends.* "With *all thy heart*, and with *all thy soul.*" It must be *sincere*, and not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth.—*Intense*, not a lukewarm and languishing desire, but a vigorous and hallowing flame, ever burning on the altar of the heart.—*Supreme*, admitting no rival, but refining and regulating all subordinate attachments to inferior objects.—*Entire* in its character, casting out all tormenting fear, reaching to all the faculties of the soul, and engaging all the powers and energies of the mind in desiring, adoring, and enjoying its glorious object; and thus *concentrating* the creature in the Creator, and *assimilating* its subjects into the image of the God of life and love, 1 John iv, 16, 17.—*Operative*, inspiring love to our neighbours, to our Christian brethren, and even to our enemies; and producing implicit obedience to him "who died for us, and rose again," Matt. v, 44; 2 Cor. v, 14, 15.—*Progressive*, "abounding yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment, being rooted and grounded in love, and filled with all the fulness of God," Eph. iii, 17-19.—*Such* love is justly due to the Lord our God, and is highly becoming the character and pro-

fession of the saints.—We may also observe, in the description of religion in the text,

III. THE FELICITY OF ITS SUBJECTS:—"That thou mayest *live*." This assertion affords both instruction and encouragement. It plainly intimates the destructive tendency of sin, and the quickening and saving efficacy of Divine grace.

1. *The misery of the impenitent is fairly implied.* The life here offered to the Jews, was suspended on their love and obedience to the Lord their God. If they returned unto him, and were circumcised in heart, they would escape the awful curses denounced on the incorrigible, and obtain the salvation promised to them that believe, ver. 1-5.—*Life's* opposite is *death;* and those who lose the former, must endure the latter. The wicked are already *legally* dead by the condemning sentence of the law, and *spiritually* dead in trespasses and sins: and except they speedily repent, they will eternally perish "in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you." Oh sinner, escape for thy life!

2. *The reward of the righteous is divinely promised:*—"That thou mayest *live*." This gracious promise is very important and comprehensive. It not merely includes a *negative deliverance* from a death of sin, but is also expressive of the peculiar excellency and perpetuity of religion, as a principle of *spiritual* and *eternal* life. The Christian has passed from death unto life, and now lives by faith in the Son of God, "walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." They not only live naturally, but godly, devoutly, joyfully, and faithfully, by the grace of God; and will live gloriously and eternally in the deathless regions of a blissful immortality beyond the grave. There will be no more pain, nor sorrow, nor dying: for "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life," Isa. xxxv, 10; Rev. vii, 17.

We may conclude by observing, 1. The necessity of personal purity, without which the external ordinances of Christianity are insufficient and unprofitable. And, 2. The exalted character and blessedness of the pious, as participants of saving grace, and heirs of the glorious "inheritance of the saints in light."

ETA.

VIII.—*The Fragility of Human Life.*

JOB xiv, 1, 2.

"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

DEATH is justly designated 'the king of terrors:' before him the monarch trembles and the subject is afraid, and to his dread sceptre all must bow, since "it is appointed unto men once to die," Heb. ix, 27. The great duty of man, therefore, is to conduct himself as a candidate for eternity, by securing an interest in Him who conquered death in his dark domains, and is able to deliver them who through fear of death are subject to bondage, Heb. ii, 14, 15. If death plunged man into the gulf of annihilation, he might pass through life fearless of its close; but when we consider it connected with eternal results, it becomes the duty and wisdom of all to improve the present moment. With such an object in view, let us notice,

I. THE IMPORTANT IDEAS SUGGESTED IN OUR TEXT.

II. IMPROVE THEM BY PRACTICAL INFERENCES.

I. THE IMPORTANT IDEAS SUGGESTED. From our text we learn,

1. *That human life is flattering in its commencement:*—Man "cometh forth like a flower." Imagery more appropriate could not have been selected. Children are like flowers in the bud, unfolding their beauty as days and months increase; their innocent actions—their broken accents—the expansion of the mind, and the acquisition of new ideas, fascinate and involuntarily allure the affections of their fond parents, who watch over them with the tenderest anxiety. In one child they see a human form, which the maturity of age will render beautiful.—In another, a nerve that will riot in danger.—A third, displaying clearness of thought, and sobriety of judgment; and a fourth, manifesting a combination of qualities admirably adapted to the purposes of life. In the opening bud the father's eye discovers much to excite hope, and the mother sees with delight the child of promise; but alas!

'Nipt by the wind's unkindly blast,
Parch'd by the sun's directer ray,
The momentary glories waste,
The short-lived beauties die away.'

The flower is cut down, Psa. ciii, 15, 16; Isa. xl, 6, 7; James i, 10, 11; 1 Pet. i, 24.

2. *Disastrous in its continuance:*—"Full of trouble." Misfortunes and calamities surround us on every hand, and proclaim nothing certain in this uncertain world. To calculate on unruffled peace, or uninterrupted prosperity, in this mutable state, is presumptuous; our stay on earth is connected with trials of various kinds, and no situation can exempt us from suffering. The word of God, experience, and observation, confirm the doctrine of our text, and testify that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," Job v, 7.

3. *Contracted in its span:*—"Few days." Life, in its longest period, is but a short journey from the cradle to the tomb. This made the pious and venerable patriarch to exclaim, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," Gen. xlvii, 9. Various are the figures employed to illustrate the shortness of human life; it is compared to "a step," 1 Sam. xx, 3;—"a post," Job ix, 25;—"a tale that is told," Psa. xc, 9;—"a weaver's shuttle," Job vii, 6;—and "a vapour," James iv, 14.

4. *Incessant in its course:*—"Fleeth as a shadow." Human life is measured by seconds—hours—days—weeks—months—and years. These periodical revolutions roll on in rapid succession, and are strikingly illustrated by the image in our text, which is supposed to be taken from the shadow cast by the sun on the earth. Some suppose it the shadow of the sun dial: but whether we consider it as the shadow of the evening, which is lost when night comes on; or the shadow on a dial plate, which is continually moving onward; or the shadow of a bird flying, which stays not;—the figure fully represents the life of man, which is passing away, whether we are loitering or active, careless or serious, killing or improving time.

5. *Eventful in its issue.* Death introduces us into the fixed state of eternity, and puts a final period to all earthly enjoyments and suffering: the soul dismissed from its clay tabernacle, is introduced into a world of spirits, from whence there is no return. The wicked, at death, exchange their supposed happiness for perpetual misery, and their imaginary light for thickest darkness, "where the worm dieth not," &c, Mark ix, 48. The righteous, at death, leave the wilderness, and enter the promised land; exchange a state of suffering and conflict, for an eternity of peace and rest: so that death, though terrific in any form, is the harbinger of good to the Christian; proclaiming victory to the warrior, rest to the pilgrim, a crown for the conqueror, and repose for the weary.

II. IMPROVE THEM BY PRACTICAL INFERENCES. Such being the character of human life, it is the duty and wisdom of piety,

1. *To enrich the juvenile mind with religious instruction.* "Man cometh forth as a flower," therefore let instruction drop as the rain, and fall as the dew: no time must be lost; the bud is unfolding, and

'If good you plant not, vice will fill the mind.'

Combine your efforts, and strengthen each other's hands, since

'Children, like tender osiers, take the bow,
And, as they first are fashioned, still will grow.'

2. *Improve the dispensations of Providence.* If your few days are crowded with troubles of various kinds, look to the Disposer of events: "all things work together for good to them that love God," Rom. viii, 28. Are you the subjects of bodily affliction? remember here "we have no continuing city," Heb. xiii, 14. Are you bereft of friends, who died in the Lord? think of that which was a solace to David under his affliction, 1 Sam. xii, 23. Are you in darkness as to the design or final issue of your sufferings? "trust in the name of the Lord," &c, Isa. l, 10.

3. *Be diligent.* Your days are few; the fugitive moment refuses to stay, and each second brings you nearer either to heaven or hell. Think, mortal man, of that part which dieth not, and live for eternity: for, "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. vi, 2. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," Eccles. ix, 10. Pray with Moses, Psa. xc, 12.

4. *Maintain a noble detachment from the world.* We are strangers and pilgrims on earth, dwelling "in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth," Job iv, 19: tenants at will. Why then should we be so fond of earthly toys, when

'Each pleasure hath its poison too,
And every sweet a snare.'

Our days flee away as a shadow; it therefore "remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not," &c, 1 Cor. vii, 29, 30.

5. *Live in a constant readiness for your change.* The eventful hour is at hand; therefore "be ye also ready," Matt. xxiv, 48. Live as dying creatures in a dying world. Make religion the business of your lives, the controlling principle of every action. Frequently examine yourselves whether you have

faith in, and love to, our Lord Jesus Christ; whether you are in possession of, or earnestly seeking, that "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord," Heb. xii, 14. "Be not deceived! God is not mocked!"

APPLICATION.

1. *To the young.* Your strength, beauty, and all other accomplishments, are only like flowers: boast not yourselves of to-morrow; rather to-day say to God, "My Father, thou shalt be the guide of my youth."

2. *To those who have escaped the dangers of infancy and inexperienced youth.* For what purpose have you been living? Has Christ had the pre-eminence, or have earthly things engrossed your affections? Forget not that you are dying creatures, and "prepare to meet your God," Amos iv, 12.

3. *To those of you whose days have dwindled to the longest span.* Your hoary locks, trembling limbs, and palsied heads, proclaim the number of your days. Are your souls ripe for the heavenly garner? If not, for once be serious; hasten to Jesus, the only shelter from the impending storm.

KAPPA.

IX.—*The final Journey anticipated.*

JOB XVI, 22.

"When a few years are come, then shall I go the way whence I shall not return."

"IT is appointed unto men once to die." This is a solemn truth, and one to which every human being must concede an unhesitating assent; for the irrevocable mandate of heaven is, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This gloomy theme, which is generally appalling to human nature, is capable of furnishing consolation to a certain description of character: the afflicted, bereaved, and persecuted servant of God "would not live always;" "to depart and be with Christ, is," in his esteem, "far better." This was the view which the pious but afflicted author of our text took of the subject. Having, in the inscrutable dispensations of Divine Providence, been a partaker of almost every species of bereavement and suffering, he contemplated the time of his departure from earth with pious

satisfaction. He had a firm confidence in the blessed Redeemer; ch. xix, ver. 25; and hence, while he daily proved human life to be afflictive in its progress, he rejoiced because of the circumscribed limit of its duration,—"When a few years are come," &c.

In discoursing from this passage, we shall,

I. CONSIDER THE MOMENTOUS JOURNEY WHICH IS HERE ANTICIPATED.

II. DESCRIBE THE EFFECT WHICH THIS ANTICIPATION OUGHT TO PRODUCE.

I. CONSIDER THE MOMENTOUS JOURNEY WHICH IS HERE ANTICIPATED. Under the figure of a journey, Job directs our attention to that important period, when the immortal spirit must quit terrestrial things, and our perishing bodies be consigned to the silent grave, there to remain till the final trump shall arouse the slumbering dust, and call the nations of the tomb to judgment. This journey may be considered—*Solemn in its nature—Indisputable in its certainty—Unknown in its commencement—Important in its consequences.*

1. *Solemn in its nature.* There is an undescribable solemnity in death, even to the man who is best prepared for the event. Death implies a separation of those closely united companions, the body and the soul; the one to mingle with the "clods of the valley," and the other to return to God its author, Eccl. xii, 7. The dissolution of every earthly bond is involved; wives, husbands, parents, brethren, friends, houses, lands, gold, silver, and every other consideration that can elicit human attention, must be parted with, and left behind; however firm the bond may be, the ruthless grasp of death will tear it asunder. The path is unexplored; at least, the experience of those who have gone is of very little benefit to survivors: to know what it is to die, we must enter the darksome vale. This journey, is of a solitary description; we must perform it lonely and unattended: the tenderness of affection and the pomp of equipage are of very little avail in the hour of mortality; neither love, friendship, nor faithful service, can afford any support beyond the boundaries of time.

2. *Indisputable in its certainty.* The decree consequent upon the paradisiacal transgression is irrevocable, Gen. iii, 19; and has been in full operation from that lamentable period to the present moment. The frailty of human nature, together with those various pains incident to man, establish this certainty. A very trivial occurrence may stop the current of life, and burst asunder the vital bond.

'Wet, dry, cold, hot—at the appointed hour—
All act subservient to the tyrant's power:
And when obedient nature knows his will,
A fly, a grape stone, or a hair, can kill.'

The general testimony of the sacred Scriptures, and the daily exhibitions of mortality, also confirm the assertion, Zech. i, 5.

3. *Unknown in its commencement.* The moment when we shall be called to begin this momentous journey is wisely hid from our view. Our passage to the tomb may be by slowly-rolling years of gnawing pain; or by a sudden stroke we may be launched into eternity, at a period when such an event is least expected. It may be in the spring of life, when blooming youth is anticipating a long succession of enjoyments yet in the womb of time; or the chilling summons may come at that period when man, in his full strength, is buying, selling, and getting gain, and totally unprepared for a sudden departure. The monumental inscriptions of our grave-yards demonstrate that men of every age lie mouldering there, from the cradled infant, to the hoary-headed sire of fourscore years. The icy hand of death may seize its victim at the solemn hour of midnight, "when deep sleep has fallen upon men;" or it may tear him away from the circle of social enjoyment, and consign him to the dreary grave with the dimple of mirth upon his cheek. So frail and uncertain is the tenure of human life, James iv, 14.

4. *Important in its consequences.* The hour of death terminates all possibility of spiritual improvement. There is no throne of grace accessible to those who have entered the dark domain of death. This journey leads to the bar of God, and terminates in an unalterable state of happiness or misery extreme, Matt. xxv, 46. When the sinner is dismissed from the present state of being, the door of mercy is closed, and nothing awaits him but inconceivable and interminable anguish, Rom. ii, 8, 9.

II. DESCRIBE THE EFFECT WHICH THIS ANTICIPATION OUGHT TO PRODUCE. The anticipation of a journey so momentous in its nature and consequences, ought,

1. *To elicit serious examination respecting our state of preparation.* Man by nature is not prepared for this important event, having neither provision necessary to support him, nor that passport which is necessary for a favourable reception at the end of his journey. A suitable preparation consists in a personal saving interest in Jesus Christ; and nothing short of this can enable a man to contemplate the solemn hour of death with calm tranquillity of soul; Rom. v, 1—6; Phil. i, 19—23.

2. *To excite just fear in those who are unprepared.* Every man who is unprepared is an enemy to God, and exposed to his just displeasure; and the sacred Scriptures contain the most awful denunciations against such characters: consequently, to such persons a sudden removal from earth would involve nothing short of the sudden encounter of almighty vengeance! And who can bear the thought of this? Ps. ix, 17; Mark xvi, 16.

3. *To stimulate the righteous to constant watchfulness.* The blessed Redeemer of the human race has inculcated watchfulness on the part of his followers, as intimately connected with a constant preparation for a sudden removal to an upper and a better world; Matt. xxiv, 42; Mark xiii, 35. If the time when this journey will commence be quite uncertain, it most assuredly is our wisdom to hold ourselves in constant readiness for the event, that we be not taken by surprise.

4. *It furnishes a source of consolation to the afflicted Christian.* He looks forward with solemn delight to that period when he shall be called from this state of suffering and pain to the blissful regions of immortality. He would suffer, to the glory of God, as long as infinite wisdom sees it good for him; yet he would hail his dismissal with joy. Death to him has lost his terrors; and hence he considers the hour of his dissolution as the time of his introduction to *angelical society—heavenly employment—a fulness of felicity—the unveiled glories of his Redeemer*—and the whole, *eternal in duration.* While tabernacling on earth, he considers himself absent from that fulness of joy which his soul desires to participate, 2 Cor. v, 1—8.

OMICRON.

X.—*The Important Request.*

PSALM XXV, 11.

"For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great."

THE absolute dependance of the creature on the Creator, renders prayer equally the duty and privilege of mankind. We are therefore taught both by reason and Scripture, "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." And though the omniscient Jehovah perfectly knows our necessities, and the blessings which we desire; "yet for all these things will he be

inquired of to do them for us." And hence the righteous have in all ages, cultivated a spirit of genuine devotion, and lived in habits of gratitude and praise. Thus the royal Psalmist, as "a man after God's own heart," was deeply imbued with the "spirit of grace and supplication," and enjoyed intimate intercourse and communion with "the Father of mercies." Many of his prayers and thanksgivings are recorded in this book, which are greatly diversified in their character and tendency; and eminently suited to the various states and circumstances of the saints in every succeeding period of the church. In this psalm, David lifts up his soul to the Almighty, and boldly professes unshaken confidence in his name,—gratefully acknowledges the divine goodness,—and earnestly implores, in the text, his mercy and salvation; "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon," &c. This important prayer contains, an ingenuous confession of sin,—an appropriate request for pardon,—and an argument urged to obtain success.

I. An ingenuous confession of sin;—"Mine iniquity is great." Whether David here refers to his conduct in the matter of Uriah is very uncertain; but it is evident that he was deeply conscious of some defection from the Lord, which greatly distressed his mind, and led him to confess and bewail the greatness of his transgression. And as fallen and guilty sinners, we shall be induced to adopt a similar confession, if we seriously consider,

1. *Our sins are great in their number.* The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, and the whole world is guilty before God. But all men do not run to the same excess in wickedness; yet the crimes of every sinner are *innumerable.* Sin is the transgression of the law, which is "holy, just, and good," and requires perfect, universal, and constant obedience. It is exceeding broad, extending to every thought, desire, purpose, word, and work of the moral creature. How often then do we all offend, and come short of the glory of God! How many have been the follies of our childhood,—the crimes of our youth,—and the backslidings of our riper age! How numerous are our sins of omission and commission; open and secret; in heart and life! Hence said Eliphaz to Job, "Is not thy wickedness great, and thine iniquities infinite?" And David declares, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me."

2. *Our sins are great in their turpitude.* We are divinely assured, that "sin is an evil and bitter thing;" and the exceed-

ing vileness and deformity of its nature, appear—*from the Being against whom it is committed*, who is infinitely great, good, and glorious, and delights in the happiness of his creatures, Psalm cxlv, 9; 1 Tim. ii, 4;—*from the dignity and circumstances of its subjects;* who are created, redeemed, and preserved for the glory of the Creator; and blessed with every privilege to facilitate their immortal interests, Rom. ii, 4;—*from the degrading characters which it sustains;* as ignorance, ingratitude, enmity, rebellion, bondage, folly, shame, disease, death, &c.—and *from the awful effects which it produces;* in dishonouring the Almighty, rejecting the Saviour, destroying the sinner, filling the world with miseries, and hell with the vengeance of eternal fire! Behold then how horribly vile, malignant, and detestable is sin! Psa. v, 5; Jer. xliv, 4; Hab. i, 13.

3. *Our sins are great in their demerit.* The punishment due to sin must be in proportion to the majesty and glory of God, whose dignity it daringly insults, and whose law it impiously violates. Who then can calculate the wages of ungodliness, or the horrors of perdition! We may, however, partially discover the desert of sin, as exhibited in the doom of the fallen angels—the expulsion of man from paradise—the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah—the judgments inflicted on the wicked in every age—the evils and calamities which abound in the world—the sufferings and death of Christ for mankind—and the final destruction of the ungodly, "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." But description fails; for language cannot express, nor the mind fully conceive, the just demerit and awful consequences of transgression. Tremble then, ye stout hearted sinners, and earnestly cry, "Save, Lord, or we perish!" And thank God, salvation is possible. Our text affords encouragement to the penitent, and contains,

II. An appropriate request for pardon;—"O Lord, pardon mine iniquity!" This ardent petition is highly impressive in its manner, and comprehensive in its import, and is strictly applicable to all who feel and lament the burden of sin; as,

1. *The language of genuine repentance.* The Psalmist was evidently conscious of the guilt and deformity of his iniquity, and was deeply humbled and contrite under a sense of his unfaithfulness. His backslidings reproved him, and he was penitently filled with his own ways, ver. 18. His unfeigned compunction of heart was accompanied with a penitential acknowledgment of sin, and earnest prayer for Divine forgiveness, ver. 7. Repentance is absolutely necessary to obtain pardon, and is there

fore sacredly enjoined as an imperious duty on all mankind, Acts xvii, 30. It is distinguished by deep conviction—sincere contrition—humble confession—gracious shame—practical fruits—and Divine acceptance, Matt. iii, 8; Psa. li, 17.

2. *The language of devout solicitude.* David was well assured that God only could forgive his sin; and hence, in the text, he sincerely and fervently prays, "O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Faithful prayer is a sure evidence of true penitence, and is essentially connected with the attainment of mercy, and every spiritual blessing, Psa. li, 1; Ezek. xxxvi, 37. When Jesus Christ apprehended Saul of Tarsus, he assured Ananias of the *fact* of his repentance, by emphatically declaring, "Behold, he prayeth." And when the penitent publican went up to the temple to pray, he devoutly exclaimed, "God be merciful to me a sinner; and went down to his house justified." Penitential prayer is always characterized by sincerity of heart—humility of mind—agony of spirit—and fervency of manner.

3. *The language of humble confidence.* The royal suppliant was undoubtedly acquainted with the appointed method of salvation; and implicitly confided in the mercy and goodness of God, for the remission of his sins. He was therefore believingly induced to call on the name of the Lord, in full expectation of obtaining the blessing requested. Prayer always supposes a measure of confidence in the Being addressed, and an encouraging hope of succeeding in the object desired. Such a reverential boldness is highly necessary when we approach the throne of grace, to solicit mercy to pardon, "and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. x, 19—22. This appears to have been the devout state of the Psalmist's mind, when he presented the prayer in the text, which also includes,

III. An argument urged to obtain success;—"For thy *name's sake*, O Lord," &c. This plea is peculiarly appropriate and emphatic; and may be regarded as suggesting, that,

1. *The pardon of sin displays the glory of the Divine perfections.* God's name signifies his nature; and this intimates that David expected forgiveness, solely on the ground of his infinite mercy and goodness. And if it be the glory of a man to pass over a transgression, it is surely much more to the glory and honour of God, to "pass by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, because he delighteth in mercy." By the sovereign act of pardon, through the scheme of redemption, the glorious character of the Deity is eminently displayed, as a God of essential justice, holiness, goodness, faithfulness, and love.

Rom. iii, 25, 26; 1 John i, 9. The perfections of Jehovah equally *co-operate* and perfectly *harmonize*, in redeeming and saving sinners, Psa. lxxxv, 10. "Who then is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and retaineth not his anger for ever?"

2. *The pardon of sin demonstrates the efficacy of Christ's atonement.* We are assured, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." And hence the Jewish sacrifices were emblematic types and shadows of the sacrificial death of the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Pardon therefore originates in Divine love, and is procured by virtue of Christ's sufferings and mediation, Luke xxiv, 46, 47; 1 John ii, 1, 2. But a personal *apprehension* of his precious blood by faith, is necessary to obtain an experimental *realization* of his redeeming benefits, Gal. ii, 20. Believers thus individually *prove*, that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins."

3. *The pardon of sin exemplifies the truth of the sacred Scriptures.* The Lord, throughout his word, solemnly engages, *fully* to absolve the guilt of returning penitents, Exod. xxxiv, 6, 7; Isa. i, 18; Acts xiii, 38, 39. He is ever ready to forgive, and waits that he may be exalted, and glorified in our salvation. The truth of his promises is happily realized by all the subjects of pardoning mercy, who "believe with the heart unto righteousness." They faithfully credit his declarations, trust in his goodness, and, through the pardon of sin, actually experience that "all his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus."

In conclusion, we may warn the careless—encourage the penitent—and congratulate the saints, who have received "the knowledge of salvation, by the remission of their sins."

ETA.

XI.—*An Excitement to Courage.*

PSALM XXXI, 24.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

THE Psalms were composed at different times by different persons, and under the influence of various feelings. Moses, Asaph, David, and others, were their authors; and Ezra, it is thought, collected them into one volume after the Babylonish captivity. This psalm was written either in a time of deep distress, or to commemorate a deliverance from it. In this distress, the Psalmist puts his trust in God, resigns himself into his hands, and prays for deliverance, see ver. 1—3. In the verse preceding the text, after having delighted himself with the contemplation of the goodness of God, ver. 19, he exclaims, "O love the Lord all ye his saints," &c, and then adds, "Be of good courage," &c. Here we have,

I. CHARACTERS SPECIFIED:—"All ye that hope in the Lord."

II. ADVICE ADMINISTERED:—"Be of good courage."

III. STRENGTH PROMISED:—"He shall strengthen your heart."

Hope is the confident expectation of some possible good. If the object anticipated be not really or ideally good, we dread its approach, instead of seeking for its enjoyment; if it be not possible, we despair of possessing it. To hope in the LORD is to expect our *all* from him; to have some reason for that expectation; and to use means that we may realize all that we expect.

1. *To hope in the Lord is to expect our all from him.* God is the fountain of being and blessedness; all good centres in him; and without him nothing is wise, nothing strong, nothing good. But whatever expectations may be entertained by carnal men, they all centre in the world; they "make gold their hope, and silver their confidence;" an honourable alliance, an increase of wealth, or an accession of carnal pleasure, is all they hope for. They that hope in the LORD, expect all from him; from his providence they hope for a supply for their daily wants; from his mercy, a pardon for their sins; from his wisdom, direction in all difficulties; from his power, strength and defence; and from his

love, all *that* grace and glory which he hath promised to bestow upon his believing people.

2. *To hope in the Lord is to have some reason for that expectation.* Hence St. Peter mentions a *reason* of the hope that is within us. Expectations are often ill-founded and irrational; ignorance, false notions of the Deity, prejudice of education, or self-love, may give birth to a fanciful expectation; but they that hope in the LORD, in the sense in which the text is to be understood, have a sure foundation for their hope. They are *the children of God*, and their relation to the Most High becomes a ground or reason for their hope. They are *the heirs of promise*, and they find in the divine word encouragement to hope, Psa. cxix, 49; Rom. xv, 4.

3. *To hope in the Lord implies the use of those means which will enable us to realize our expectation.* Hope is an active, vigorous principle; what we hope for, we labour to secure. "Every man that hath this hope in him," &c, 1 John iii, 3. Hope, unattended by exertion, is the offspring of presumption, rather than the fruit of the Spirit; they who hope in the Lord, will do what he hath enjoined, and shun what he hath prohibited.

II. ADVICE ADMINISTERED:—"Be of good courage."

Courage is active fortitude; sometimes it is constitutional, and displays itself on all occasions, without judgment or discretion. But when it arises from a sense of duty, and a fear of offending Him who made us, it always acts consistently with reason and religion. We should be prompt to attend to this advice from a consideration,

1. *Of the perils and difficulties that attend us.* Every part of our religious course is encompassed with difficulty, and beset by danger. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way," &c, Matt. vii, 14. The world will either smile upon us, to allure us from the path of duty, or frown upon us to impede our steps in pursuing it. The devil will either act as a wily serpent to seduce us, or as a roaring lion to devour us; and the flesh will seek its ease, shun the cross, and shrink from the way where danger lurks. Without courage what can be done?

2. *Of the cause in which we are engaged.* When a man takes up arms to repel the encroachments of a most inveterate foe, who threatens to rob him of his property, and take away his life; when his dearest interests are at stake, and he contends for the possession of all that is valuable, the cause in which he is engaged demands courage. Such is our case. All that is dear to us is involved in the perilous warfare in which we are engaged:

our happiness, our honour, our interest, and our souls are at stake; we contend "with principalities and powers," &c. We contend for victory, and for glory; O with what courage should we fight!

3. *Of the Captain of our salvation, under whose banners we fight.* The goodness of our cause may afford us ground for courage, but if we fight under a commander who has no skill to lead us on to action, we shall despair of success. Our glorious Leader has never fought but to conquer. He is the Lord of hosts; and he leads on the armies of the living God, to conquests and a crown. No foe can foil us while we listen to his word of command; no enemy can vanquish us while he is our shield and buckler. "In all these things we are more than conquerors," &c, Rom. viii, 37.

"'Courage,' your Captain cries,
Who all your toil foreknew;
'Toil ye shall have, yet all despise,
I have o'ercome for you.'"

4. *Of the glorious rewards that await us.* Many an earthly warrior has fought manfully, and yet won no victory, and shared no reward; and many, after the toils and perils of warfare, have been obliged to 'beg bitter bread through realms their valour saved.' "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous." A reward proportioned to the toils, and privations, and dangers, they sustain upon earth; a reward of inconceivable glory, and infinite duration; and a reward "which the Lord the righteous judge shall *freely* bestow upon all who love his appearing." And should not this inspire us with courage? Who can contemplate such a vast reward, without rousing all his energies to contend with more determined purpose against the enemies of his salvation?

III. Strength promised:—"He shall strengthen your heart." The heart here, means the immortal part of man as distinguished from the animal part. God strengthens the heart,

1. *By illuminating the understanding, and communicating a knowledge of Divine truth to the mind.* A man may have strength of understanding for the pursuits of science, and yet be totally incapacitated for knowing spiritual things. With the talents of an angel, a man may be a fool, 1 Cor. ii, 14. "Knowledge is power;" and the more a man knows of God, the more he will be qualified for doing his will.

2. *By confirming the will in the cause of truth.* The will does not always harmonize with the understanding; we may know the truth, and yet pursue error; "For the good that I

would, I do not; but the evil which I would not that I do." But God can strengthen the heart, by working in us to will; giving a new bias to the will, that it may adhere inflexibly to the line of duty.

3. *By drawing the affections wholly towards himself.* The affections are powerful springs of action, and the morality of a man's character will be formed according to their direction. The love of evil leads to the practice of evil. God strengthens the heart, by controlling the desires, impressing us with his fear, shedding abroad his love in the soul, and enabling us to realize the truth of that text, "Whom have I in heaven," &c, Psalm lxxiii, 25. The strength promised is *spiritual*, not strength of sinew, or limb, or body, but of soul;—*divine*, above the powers of nature, God's strength;—*proportionable*, "As thy days," &c, Deut. xxxiii, 25;—*increasing*, "They go from strength," &c, Psa. lxxxiv, 7. "He *shall strengthen* your heart;" He *can* do it, for he is the Lord God Omnipotent; He *will* do it, because he has promised to do it, and he has always accomplished his promises.

In conclusion inquire,

1. Are we found among the people who hope in the Lord? Some are without hope; some have a hope, but it is not in the Lord; some have the hypocrite's hope.

2. Does our hope inspire us with courage? Can we rejoice in hope of the glory of God? O recollect that in proportion as our hope grows stronger, so will our courage!

3. Do we experience the truth of the divine promise in the text? Does God strengthen us? Have we strength to do what he commands?—to suffer what he inflicts? He will strengthen your hearts, all ye that hope in the Lord. Only be of good courage.

BETA.

XII.—*An Invitation to participate in the Goodness of the Lord.*

PSALM XXXIV, 8.

"O taste and see that the LORD is good."

IF there be any exercise upon earth that bears a resemblance to the employment of heaven, or any sensation that men feel in common with angels, it is that of gratitude to God; and among all the inspired writers, no man engaged more heartily in this delightful occupation than David, who was the author of this psalm. It is in a peculiar sense a psalm of praise. David begins it by declaring, "I will bless the Lord at all times," &c. There are certain exercises in the Christian life suited to peculiar seasons, but praise is never unsuitable; gratitude is never ill-timed; "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." Some boast in their wealth; others in their personal accomplishments: David gloried in the Lord; and not satisfied with doing this alone, he invited others to engage in the same exercise—"O magnify the Lord," &c, ver. 3. He then assigns the reason why he magnified the Lord, ver. 4—6; and in the text, under the influence of the same spirit, he adds, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." We have in this passage,

I. SOMETHING ASSUMED:—That "the Lord is good." There are few expressions that occur more frequently in the Psalms than this, and there is no sentiment that should be more deeply or constantly impressed upon our minds.

1. *God is infinitely good.* His goodness knows no bounds, limits, nor dimensions; so that we may well exclaim, "How great is thy goodness!"

2. *God is independently good.* His goodness is all his own: there are good men and good angels, but these are dependantly good; their goodness is not essential to their natures.

3. *God is absolutely good.* His goodness can never be extended, nor diminished; our goodness is capable of increase; it may be augmented, perhaps to all eternity; but God's goodness is always the same.

4. *God is unchangeably good.* There is no variableness in his goodness: our goodness is mutable; we are liable to change every day, but God changeth not.

5. *God is universally good.* He is good to all, and good every where; his goodness is the same in every part of the globe, and in heaven and earth the same.

6. *God is eternally good.* His goodness endureth for ever; he cannot cease to be good.

II. SOMETHING IMPLIED:—That the goodness of the Lord may be *seen* and *tasted*. There are various mediums through which the goodness of the Lord may be seen.

1. *The creation is a kind of glass or mirror, which reflects the goodness of the Lord.* There was a period in eternity, in which God alone existed; he was not necessitated to form any creatures; but he was pleased to do it, not so much to exhibit his eternal power, as to communicate his infinite goodness; hence when God finished his works of creation, he "saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good."

2. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the provision made for all creatures.* "These all wait upon thee," &c, Psa. civ, 27. "The eyes of all wait upon thee," &c, Psa. cxlv, 15. "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap," &c, Luke xii, 24.

3. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.* Man, by his personal transgression, forfeited all title to the divine favour, and exposed himself to eternal punishment; but oh! the riches of God's goodness induced him to deliver up his own Son to death for our ransom. What but goodness, unmerited and unparalleled goodness, would provide for us such a Saviour? so *suitable* to our necessities, so *powerful* to help us, and so *willing* to do us good.

4. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the means of grace with which we are favoured.* Here is the gospel, containing glad tidings and good news, spread before us. Here are the ambassadors of peace crying, "Ho! every one that thirsteth," &c. Here is the Spirit of God ready to work in us all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. Here are friends saying, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." And here are many personal, social, and religious advantages, all of which serve to display the divine goodness.

5. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the rewards of heaven;* rewards beyond the power of human conception, gratuitously bestowed, and lasting as eternity. But the goodness of the Lord may not only be seen but tasted. The soul has its appetites as well as the body. *Tasting*, literally, is proving

the quality of any thing by the mouth, or palate. David said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" St. Paul mentions some who had "tasted of the heavenly gift." To taste that the Lord is good, is to enjoy his goodness: we do this, 1. *When we receive a knowledge of salvation by the remission of our sins.* A soul labouring under a sense of guilt tastes the bitter bread of misery, and drinks the cup of baleful grief: but when God gives the burdened conscience ease, and communicates a knowledge of his favour, then the man tastes that the Lord is good. 2. *When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.* When we feel that we love him because he first loved us. 3. *When the promises are applied to our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost.* In seasons of inward conflict or outward opposition.

III. SOMETHING ENJOINED. "O taste and see," &c. This invitation, request, or admonition is,

1. *Divine in its origin.* David wrote it, who was a warrior, a politician, a monarch, and a divine; but he wrote it under the influence of the Holy Ghost, and therefore it is God that speaks to us in the affectionate language of the text.

2. *Reasonable in its nature.* We are endowed with powers and faculties capable of this exercise; we can taste and see that the Lord is good; and what God has rendered us capable of doing, it is reasonable that we should do. The inferior orders of beings see nature smiling around them, but the Lord of nature they cannot see: they taste their rich pastures, but the goodness of God they cannot taste.

3. *Pleasurable in its exercise.* Sometimes we contemplate the divine character with trembling awe; God comes out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. He rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm; and we hear the voice of God, and are afraid: but to taste and see that the Lord is good, produces feelings of another description; feelings of pleasure, which can never be exceeded on earth, and enjoyments which can only be paralleled in heaven.

4. *Profitable in its result.* This is the only method by which we can enjoy God. The more we taste and see of the goodness of God, the more contentment we shall possess in our stations, and the more resignation to the allotments of God's providence. By tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord upon earth, we shall be prepared for these exercises in heaven, and we shall anticipate with exquisite delight the period, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known.

INFER,

1. That there is something more in religion than the mere profession, or outward form: there is the exercise of mental powers; a tasting and seeing the Lord is good. This is personal, and known only to ourselves.

2. How wretched those are who forego these pleasures, and refuse to comply with the requisition in the text,—who know nothing but animal gratification and sensual pleasure.

3. Those who enjoy personal piety, are anxious for others to realize the same enjoyment, and are ready to say to their families, friends, and neighbours, "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

4. If the Lord is good, let us learn the design of that goodness. Rom. ii, 4.

BETA.

XIII.—*Evangelical Purity.*

PSALM li, 10.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God."

THIS is the language of a heart deeply acquainted with its own bitterness, and ardently longing for a deliverance from its evils. David was never more sensible, I apprehend, of the necessity of the entire renovation of his moral nature than when he composed this psalm, having fallen into the commission of dreadful crimes, in the case of Uriah the Hittite, and Bathsheba his wife. These enormities having originated in the depravity of his heart, he was now painfully convinced that it must undergo a thorough change. Hence he prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

I. HERE OUR ATTENTION IS DIRECTED TO AN IMPORTANT OBJECT;—"a clean heart."

1. It is well to understand the nature and reason of things.—Adam was created in a perfect state, holy and happy; but, abusing his moral liberty, he sinned and fell. Being his natural descendants, we have derived from him an impure nature, which has manifested itself in various ways, as well in early life, as in more mature age. The history of man is a record of the constant succession of crimes, committed against the laws both of God and man. These have not arisen from education or the

want of it, or from habits contracted by intercourse with men, but from the *heart*. "For from within," says our Saviour, "out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness;" all these evil things come from within, and defile the man. Mark vii, 21, 22.

2. When inward sins are checked by the restraining grace of God, when the conscience is enlightened and awakened by the Holy Spirit—nay, when even guilt is wholly removed from the soul, by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ; still there remains the natural taint, the original stain, which, though it has not an ascendancy, yet it will show itself on many occasions, and, if not carefully watched, as a latent enemy, will break forth into actual transgression. Thus believers in Christ feel in themselves a war between the flesh and the Spirit: but the old man of sin being nailed to the cross, that he may be crucified, however he may struggle to get free, while faith is in lively exercise, all his efforts are unavailing. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi, 14.

3. The removal of this inwrought and derived evil from the heart, is as necessary as was the taking away of the contracted guilt from the burdened conscience, when in a state of penitence. The pardon of sin, and the cleansing of the heart from all sin, are two distinct attainments in the Christian life, and received at different times, the former being anterior to the latter. If all grace were received in the gift of justification, the blessing of being "sanctified wholly," the state of being "preserved blameless," would be synonymous with it: but where in the Scriptures do we find it so? Besides, the experience of persons justified by faith in the blood of Christ, is a test of considerable moment: for, if faithful, they see it their privilege to grow in grace,—in knowledge, humility, purity, and love.

II. THE AGENT BY WHOSE OPERATION THE HEART IS TO BE CLEANSED—is God.

1. He, being essentially *holy*, is the standard of moral rectitude. His purity is the ground of the reason why we should possess a likeness to him. He can take no pleasure in those who are defiled with sin. He says, "Be ye holy, *for* I am holy," 1 Pet. i, 16. The apostle James thus directs, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man," James i, 13. The holiness of God is unchangeable.

2. He has, in his inexpressible goodness, provided, in Christ, for our being made clean from sin. Jesus Christ not only shed his blood for "the remission of sins," Matt. xxvi, 28, but his blood is so extensive in its efficacy, that it "cleanses from all sin," 1 John i, 7. And the experience of this truth is so essential to the Christian, that our Saviour said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," John xiii, 8. And what he said to one, he says to all.

3. He has given his Holy Spirit for the express purpose of making us holy. The Spirit is not only holy in his nature, but also in all his operations on the heart of man. He illuminates, to discover sin;—produces conviction, to give a feeling of it;—communicates strength, to inspire resolution against it;—leads a penitent to Christ, that he may receive forgiveness of it;—penetrates to the bottom of the heart, that he may eradicate all its evils. He is "the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Tim. 1, 7.

4. He has furnished ample means, in the right use of which persons may be made clean. The word of God, either as written or faithfully preached, is fully in point. Our Saviour thus prayed to his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," John xvii, 17. The word of God is the means of producing faith in the heart. As "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Rom. x, 17, so God "purifies the heart by faith," Acts xv, 9. Precepts, doctrines, promises, have each a direct bearing on the purification of the heart; nay threatenings themselves are as so many guards placed around it, to give alarm in times of danger. Sabbaths, sermons, the Lord's Supper, secret prayer, the family altar, all these are immediately connected with this interesting object. Thus when we consider that God is the Author of this cleansing of the heart from sin, and has provided such abundant means for this purpose, we cannot doubt of the possibility of obtaining a clean heart.

III. The manner of applying for it—*by prayer*. The text is a solemn prayer to God for a clean heart. The remarks this prayer suggests are,

1. It is the result of *conviction*. If David had not felt his need of a clean heart, he would not thus have prayed for it. Conviction always precedes the obtaining of it. This is a necessary preparation for it, and always ceases when this blessing is received. We no longer hope for what we possess.

2. It is expressive of *belief*. If David had not believed this degree of salvation attainable, he would not have prayed for it;

but as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit thus to pray, he was correct in his application.

3. It shows the earnestness of *desire*. David was not only sincere, but fervent; his whole soul was in this prayer. His case was too pressing, and the object too important, to allow himself to be lukewarm.

4. It conveys a lively *expectation*. David most certainly expected that God would both hear and answer this prayer. If not, why did he pray? He was consistent in performing this duty, hoping to succeed.

5. It exhibits vigorous *effort*. David's soul was in an agony; all his powers were in exercise. Anxious to realize the effects of a divine creating energy in his own heart, he presses toward the mark for this invaluable prize.

We should all heartily adopt these sentiments of David, and faithfully follow his example herein.

THETA.

XIV.—*Israel's Provocations against God, and the Punishment inflicted on them.*

PSALM XCV, 10, 11.

"Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: unto whom I sware in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest."

'GREAT ills are the achievements of great powers,' and great guilt is the abuse of great privileges, the violation of great obligations, and the sure presage of great punishment. Where there is much given, there is much required. If you have some choice spot of land, which you have cultured with assiduous application, you expect proportionable returns; or if you have some favourite child, upon whose education you have lavished your property, and on the improvement of whose mind you have bestowed your attention, you naturally anticipate the most pleasing results. These remarks are not applicable to men only, but they serve to illustrate the Divine conduct. "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill," &c, "and he planted it with the choicest vine"—"and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes."—"I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard," &c, Isa. v, 1—5. The sentiments of the text are strictly consonant with these remarks, "Forty years long was I grieved," &c.

I. THE CONDUCT OF ISRAEL ;—"A people that do err in their heart," &c. Their conduct was marked by *ignorance* and *error*. "They have not known my ways," and they "do err in their hearts."

1. *Ignorance is not always criminal.* Some things we cannot know, through the limited nature of our faculties; other things God does not choose for us to know, Deut. xxix, 29; and others, it is not our interest to know. Ignorance is no crime, when knowledge is no virtue; nor is ignorance criminal, when the means of information are withheld: God will never impute blame for unavoidable ignorance.

2. *When the most important subjects are presented to us, and the most favourable means offered for knowing them, then ignorance is highly criminal.* This was Israel's case. They were ignorant of God's ways;—the ways by which God came to them, in his providential and gracious dealings with them; or the ways by which they were to go to him, in the observance of his commandments. They had ample means for acquiring this knowledge. Does not our conduct too nearly resemble theirs?

3. *Error was another of their crimes.* Ignorance produces error. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures," &c, Matt. xxii, 29. Errors are of two sorts,—of *judgment*, and of *heart*. Errors of judgment may consist with rectitude of heart; the heart may be right with God, where erroneous opinions warp the judgment. But errors of heart are the most deadly and destructive errors that exist upon earth; when the affections are perverted, and the heart wanders from God. And this is the most correct idea we can entertain of error, which signifies wandering—deviation from truth. This was Israel's error, Isa. v, 20, xxix, 13. And this error in heart gave birth to error in the life, Isa. xxviii, 7.

II. THE EFFECT PRODUCED BY THIS CONDUCT. "Forty years long was I grieved with this generation," &c.

1. *God takes cognizance of human conduct.* He sees *all our actions*, whether in the broad daylight, or amidst impenetrable darkness, for the darkness and the light are both alike to him: and he sees them *as they are;* to men they wear a dubious face: and he sees them *in all their circumstances.* Are they guilty? he discovers all the aggravations of that guilt. Some say, "How doth God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? But these are the ungodly," &c, Psa. lxxiii, 11, 12.

2. *The ignorant and erroneous conduct of men is highly offensive to God.* "I was grieved,"—and "I sware in my wrath," &c.

Not that human actions can essentially affect the Divine Being; our goodness extendeth not to him, nor can our crimes injure him; but he loves us, and loves us more tenderly than a mother can a sucking child; and because he loves us, he is grieved at our conduct. His is the grief of a father, whose bowels yearn over the miseries of a child; hence he says, "Is Ephraim my dear son?" &c, Jer. xxxi, 20. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" &c, Hosea xi, 8.

3. *God exercises long patience with his creatures.* "Forty years long was I grieved," &c. Nothing excites our astonishment more than the divine patience. The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, for the space of a hundred and twenty years; and of the Israelites this is said, "About the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness," Acts xiii, 18. And this instance of the divine patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want flesh or water, they were out of patience with God; when Moses was in the mount with God but forty days, they presently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of *forty days*, and yet God bare with them for *forty years*.

III. THE PUNISHMENT WHICH THIS CONDUCT MERITED;—"Unto whom I sware in my wrath," &c.

1. *Whatever forbearance God may exercise towards his creatures, yet a continuance of crime must ultimately produce the infliction of punishment.* The sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, but it will be executed;—it may be delayed, but it cannot be violated.

2. *Israel's punishment was a deprivation of rest;*—"They should not enter into my rest." This threatening primarily referred to the exclusion of Israel from the land of Canaan, Numb. xiv, 22, 23. This was a land of rest, compared with the toils and perils of the wilderness, Exod. xxxiii, 14. But Canaan was typically representative of heaven: therefore the apostle says, "Let us labour to enter into that rest," &c, Heb. iv, 11. Heaven is rest, as it implies a cessation from all bodily and mental labour—a deliverance from all pain—and a state of consummate happiness, arising from a full perfection of soul and body—from the enjoyment of the most exalted society—and an eternal union with God. All impenitent sinners, who like Israel grieve God by their ignorance and error, shall be deprived of this rest. They shall not enter into it—they have no preparation for it, and no promise of possession.

3. *The awfully affecting language in which the threatening is expressed, leads to reflect on the terrible doom of its subjects ;—* "I sware in my wrath." This may be illustrated by Num. xiv, 28, 29, 35, "As truly as I live, saith the Lord—your carcasses shall fall," &c. "I the Lord have said, I will surely do it." And just as certainly, and as awfully, will the threatenings of God be inflicted on all hardened and impenitent sinners.

INFERENCES.

1. Learn what ideas we ought to entertain of sin. Men may trifle with it, and mock at it, and find pleasure in it; but Oh how grievous it is to God! How offensive in his sight! It is the abominable thing that he hates.

2. That ignorance and error, which some deem perfectly innocent, expose men to the wrath of God.

3. That sin in the professing people of God, is attended with peculiar aggravations.

4. That the doom of impenitent sinners is certain and irreparable. For those who cannot enter into God's rest, will have no rest day nor night, and "the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever."

BETA.

XV.—*The wise Man rendered wiser by Instruction.*

PROVERBS IX, 9.

"Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser."

WERE the wisdom of certain ages, nations, and individuals, to be estimated by the value which they have put upon instruction, we should certainly conclude much in their favour. In no ages more than the present, in no nation more than the British, and by no individuals more than by many of our own country, has instruction been more highly valued; as is evident from the means which they approve and employ to give it, particularly to the rising generation. But this is not an infallible criterion of true wisdom, for we know there are some, who at the very time that they are approving of every plan that is adopted for the purpose of giving instruction to mankind, and especially religious instruction; and even while affording their co-operation to promote this end, are themselves living in the most egregious folly. But it is an infallible mark of true wisdom, to profit by instruc-

tion: so says our text;—"Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser." Let us,

I. TAKE A MORE ACCURATE VIEW OF THE WISE MAN; AND INQUIRE, WHO IT IS THAT MAY BE TAKEN FOR SUCH.

1. He may be considered a wise man, who proposes to himself some end in what he does, and pursues that end in a rational and dexterous manner. It is in this sense that the children of this world are said to be "wiser in their generation than the children of light." But according to this description, a man may be both wise and wicked at the same time. But,

2. According to the Bible, a truly wise man is the same with a good man: and the Scriptures make a truly wise and good man to be one; for this important reason, because there is not any thing worth pursuing, or, which is the same thing, worth being made the end and aim of a man's life, but his being good; and hence it is that from the moment any man acknowledges that this alone ought to be the great end of a residence in this world, and resolves that it shall be his, in an important sense it is that we say, such a man is wise. But we most emphatically say, that a man is wise, when,

3. To his resolution to make the attainment of moral goodness the great object of his existence, he adds a fixed and unalterable determination to pursue this according to divine direction; that is to say, by departing from all evil, as God has commanded, Job xxviii, 28;—by humbling himself as a sinner before God, Luke xviii, 10–14;—by seeking forgiveness through faith, as it is in this way only that it can be obtained, Rom. iii, 26; —by obeying Christ, Matt. vii, 24–27;—by imitating or putting on Christ, in which the essence and excellence of goodness consist, Rom. xiii, 14; Phil. ii, 5;—and by cleaving to him with purpose of heart, Acts xi, 23. He who acts this part, will in the end be found to be the wisest man. But observe,

II. THE TEXT SUPPOSES THAT INSTRUCTION MAY BE GIVEN, EVEN TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE WISE. We are not ignorant of the fact, that there are many who consider instruction to be unnecessary for the wise. But it ought to be observed,

1. That no truly wise man will account it impossible to make accessions to his wisdom. Such a man is not wise in his own conceit, Rom. xii, 16. His entrance into this course is of too recent a date, and the efforts which he has made to gain wisdom too defective, to permit him to think his wisdom incapable of augmentation, John viii, 9. And,

2. Every wise man, whatever be the nature of his wisdom, will wish it to be increased as much as possible, Prov. xviii, 15. Hence,

3. Whenever instruction is given to him, which is adapted to his character and circumstances; that is, which shows wherein he is defective, either in the end which he is pursuing, or in the manner of his pursuit, no matter by whom the instruction is given, he will account himself happy in having it, and will be the better for it, Prov. xix, 25. This is also evident from the text itself; for observe,

III. THAT WHEN INSTRUCTION IS GIVEN TO A WISE MAN, HE WILL YET BE WISER; for he will,

1. Endeavour, as far as possible, to find out the motive of the person giving it; and if that be good, he will even esteem the instruction for the sake of the motive that prompted it.

2. He will consider the nature and tendency of the instruction or advice given; and so far as it appears to be reasonable and edifying, he will be thankful for it; he will instantly apply it, and to the best of his ability, turn it to his advantage.

3. He will not forget to pray that God may give him to see what is most valuable; that he may influence his heart to profit by what is good; and accomplish in him all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, to the praise of his glory, Psa. cxxxiv, 24, cxliii, 8, 10.

To improve this subject. What shall we say of those who openly avow their hatred of all, and especially that kind of instruction which tends to make them wise and good? What shall we say of them?—Why, what can we say of them, but that they are fools in every sense in which the epithet can be applied? And what shall we say of those who affect to love instruction, particularly that which is religious, and yet do not in the least degree profit by it?—Say of them! why, that they deserve no epithet but 'Fools:' for they either show that they have not a sufficiency of understanding to estimate the value of the instruction given, or that they have bestowed no attention on the subject; or that if they *have* paid any attention to the subject, and do not discern the value of the instruction received, their judgment is under the control of the worst passions and propensities. Alas! how little of this true wisdom is to be found! Are we in the possession of it? Are we pursuing a truly good end? Are we doing this in God's own way? Are we modest in our thoughts of our own attainments? Are we really desirous of improvement? Do we respect all instruction which is given us

from a good motive? Are we never guilty of neglecting instruction of an evidently good tendency? Do we engage in sincere, ardent, and constant prayer for improvement? If we possess this wisdom, happy shall we be in ourselves, most useful shall we be to others, and most acceptable to the Judge of all in the day of his appearing.

IOTA.

XVI.—*The Effects of Sin.*

PROVERBS xiii, 6.

"Wickedness overthroweth the sinner."

THERE is a cause for every effect. The nature of causes may be ascertained from the complexion of effects; and their power by the measure of their operation. Moral evil, as a cause, has produced the most awful, alarming, and extensive consequences. This subject is now before us, and our attention is directed to the case of an individual transgressor:—"Wickedness overthroweth the sinner." We shall,

I. GIVE THE CHARACTER OF THE SINNER.

1. What is sin? "Sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John iii, 4. If there were no law, there would be no sin; for man could not transgress what had no existence: but there is a law, which, being grounded on the moral perfections of God, is "holy, and just, and good," Rom. vii, 12, and being "spiritual," extends to all the thoughts and intents of the mind. This moral law, resting on such a basis, cannot undergo the least change; of course, we being subjects of moral government, it is everlasting in its obligations.

2. Sin is therefore a contempt of God's authority, he being the only Lawgiver. Having given a rule, directing and obliging man in moral and religious actions, he cannot but regard this express revelation of his will; and every act of "transgression and disobedience" will not only be deemed a daring affront offered to his Divine Majesty, but also expose the sinner to "a just recompense of reward," Heb. ii, 2. Sin is a forfeiture of his favour, and an exposure to his sore displeasure.

3. It is true God has appointed his beloved Son to be the Saviour of the world; who, as an expression of infinite benevolence, has "tasted death for every man," Heb. ii, 9. St. Paul says,

"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," Gal. iv, 4, 5. And all who receive Jesus Christ by faith, who "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. x, 4, is, "by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, made free from the law of sin and death," Rom. viii, 2. But practical sinners, refusing to submit to Christ, sin against the gospel law of liberty and love, who will "break them in pieces like a potter's vessel," Psa. ii, 9.

4. In the rank of sinners, we reckon the open infidel, the bold blasphemer, the profane scoffer, the bloody persecutor, the base liar, the daring thief, the unfeeling extortioner and oppressor, the vile adulterer, the beastly drunkard, and every other sort of scandalous transgressors of the law of God: as well as they who neglect the important and necessary duties of religion, whether public or private, who refuse to read the holy Scriptures, or hear the word of God preached; and consequently are never found in the exercise of prayer, praise, and meditation, or employed in acts of charity and mercy, under the influence of right motives.

5. Thus we see that such persons are sinners by name, disposition, and practice; by motives, habits, and pursuits; by associations, combinations, and resolves; in opposition to the will and authority of God, the remonstrances of conscience, the threatenings and curses of the law, the invitations and promises of the gospel, the warnings and entreaties of ministers, the prayers and examples of pious Christians, the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell. Sin is the element in which they wish to live, and in which they do die.

II. SHOW HOW WICKEDNESS IS HIS RUIN.

1. It exhausts his *property*, whether much or little. Sin is a very expensive thing; a person cannot commit it to any extent, but at considerable loss, not only of time, but also of substance. The passions are clamorous, exorbitant, and restless, till gratified; and this must be repeated successively, even while habit is forming, as well as when it is confirmed by a maturity in wickedness. The case of the prodigal son is in point; who proceeded in a course of licentiousness and extravagance till he had wasted all his patrimony in riotous living, and was reduced to the necessity of desiring the husks on which the swine did feed, Luke xv, 16.

2. It blasts his *reputation*. Sin can never be deemed honourable, on correct principles; yet while practical sinners possess pecuniary means of supporting themselves in their vices, they

still keep up their name and rank in the world;—not in the church of God, nor in the estimation of Heaven. But when the means of supplying fuel necessary to feed the fires of foul desire and towering ambition fails, then their outward splendours go out in darkness, and they sink into contemptuous neglect and total forgetfulness. "The name of the wicked shall rot," Prov. x, 7; so that persons shall turn away from it with disgust. "The candle of the wicked shall be put out," Prov. xxiv, 20.

3. It destroys his *health*. Intemperance has a natural tendency to undermine the best constitution: it is a violence done to the physical order of things in the system: it renders a man old in constitution while he is young in years: it expends the natural vigour prematurely, and renders the body a weak, enervated, shadowy substance. The languors, flatulencies, hypochondriacal affections, and a long train of feelings and apprehensions, show the fatal attacks made by sin, and that the tide of life is ebbing apace.

4. It hastens the approach of *death*. Wicked men frequently do "not live out half their days;" Psa. lv, 23; "for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh as a thief in the night," 1 Thess. v, 3. Sometimes their passions hurry them forward to the commission of crimes which terminate in the most disgraceful exit; they die examples of public justice. Wisdom has "length of days in her right hand," Prov. iii, 16; but to the wicked she says, "All they that hate me love death," Prov. viii, 36.

5. It effects the damnation of the *soul*. A sinner "wrongeth his own soul," Prov. viii, 36. Obeying the dictates of sin, he quencheth the Spirit of grace, neglects the salvation of the gospel, disregards the threatenings of the law, and proceeds in acts of aggression, till having sinned beyond remedy, he goes to his own place. "The wicked shall be turned into hell," (Psa. ix, 17;) from which place there is no redemption, for the torments are literally everlasting, the smoke of them ascending up for ever and ever.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We learn how awfully destructive is the love of sin. Of this we judge by the consequences it produces.

2. We see that it is the interest of every person to hate and shun sin. The advantage is great in this world, as well as the next.

3. It is evident that a sinner, perishing in his sins, has no one

to blame but himself. This is clear from the testimony of the Scriptures, as well as the voice of conscience.

4. From a view of the whole subject we perceive the necessity, expedience, and advantage of securing true religion, by repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

THETA.

XVII.—*The Hardship of Sin.*

PROVERBS xii, 15.

"The way of transgressors is hard."

BUT who believes this? None, who set their own opinion against the testimony of revelation: nor any, who set their *bare* opinion on a level with the experience of others: nor yet any, who take their opinion of the way, from the number of those who are walking in it; for the entrance into it is wide, and the way itself very accommodating to corrupt nature; hence it is, that many are walking in it. Yet after all, if the way is to be judged of by the character of those who are walking in it, the experience of those who once frequented it, and particularly of the account that is given of it in the word of God, then must we consider it to be a hard way. To convince you of this we shall,

I. STATE TO YOU WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS.

II. CONSIDER THE DOCTRINE OF THE TEXT RESPECTING IT. It "is hard."

I. WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS.

The word "transgressor," is but another name for sinner. Characters of this description have always occupied a way peculiar to themselves; "Hast thou marked the old way?" &c, Job xxii, 15. The very name supposes those to whom it belongs to be under obligation or law, and to be violators of it; for where there is no law to bind men, there is no law to be transgressed by them; for "sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John iii, 4; Rom. iv, 15. Transgression therefore necessarily supposeth, either something done that was forbidden, or something omitted that was commanded. There is no one, but either is, or has been in the way of transgressors. For even those that are

regenerate, were in it all the time they were unregenerate: but now that they are changed, so also is their way. For the way of the upright is to depart from evil; and "he that keepeth his way, preserveth his soul," Prov. xvi, 17. Hence it is that we are told that the law was not made for a righteous man, (that is to say, for his justification,) but for the lawless, &c, 1 Timothy i, 9, 10. The way of transgressors might be thought the most honourable, and the happiest way in the world, considering the confidence of those who are in it, and their unwillingness to leave; but, alas! it will be found a fruitless and a shameful path, nay a path immediately connected with damnation, Rom. vi, 21. But this point will become more apparent, as we,

II. CONSIDER THE DOCTRINE OF THE TEXT RESPECTING THIS WAY.—It "is hard."

Let not any imagine, that this way is rendered harder than it ought to be, through undue severity in God. His love, forbearance, and longsuffering toward sinners, clearly prove the contrary: also the strong measures which he adopts to bring about their salvation, and the ready and gracious manner in which he receives those of them who return to him with a godly sorrow, furnish additional proofs that the Most High is not unnecessarily severe. Nor would the exercise of an undue degree of severity towards transgressors be an easy thing to conceive. Reflect on the heinous nature of sin: against whom is it committed? Against the greatest, the kindest and the best being in the universe! And by whom is it committed? By one who has derived his being and all his comforts and advantages from him, and the very end of whose existence is to resemble and enjoy him for ever. And under what circumstances is it committed? Even at the very moment when all his thoughts and acts towards us are those of unmerited love and good will. Could any treatment of beings so abominable be too severe? Perhaps some may be inclined to ask, If God be so kind to sinners, how can their way be hard? We answer,

1. That this very kindness renders it difficult for the transgressor either to shun or to resist the light; either to avoid or to withstand the reproof of his own mind; either to lose sight of or to become indifferent to the threatenings of God's wrath; either to escape or to endure the forebodings of everlasting misery.

2. As sinners take occasion from the lenity of God to add to the number and aggravation of their sins, Eccles. viii, 11, so it sometimes, and perhaps not unfrequently, becomes necessary

for the Divine Being to carry himself with some severity against daring and obdurate sinners, for a warning to others. Thus it happened to the old world, to the Canaanites, and to the Jewish nation, on a large scale; and thus it was with Cain, Gen. iv, 15; Zimri and Cozbi, Numb. xxv, 14; Achan, Josh. xxii, 20; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv, 28—34; Belshazzar, Dan. v, 17—30; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v, 1—11; Herod, Acts xii, 21—23; on a smaller scale. Thus what Solomon saith of wine, Prov. xxiii, 32, that while it giveth its colour and enticeth, it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder, may most emphatically be said of transgression of every kind and degree. But,

3. As Jehovah's unwillingness to destroy sinners, and his consequent endeavours to save them, render those who finally abuse his goodness singularly criminal, so will they bring on them a peculiar and a dreadfully aggravated punishment, Matt. xi, 20, to 24; Luke xii, 47; Rom. ii, 8, 9; 2 Thess. i, 8, 9. And in what would appear Jehovah's love of order, his spotless purity, his inviolable truth, his inflexible justice, and in short his infinite perfection, were he not to visit the ingratitude and baseness, the levity and incorrigibleness of sinners, with unspeakable, interminable, and intolerable sufferings beyond the grave.

Now if the way of transgressors deprives them of all that good which an indulgent God is so desirous to bestow, if it involves them in so many difficulties and miserable feelings here, and if it leads to so certain and dreadful a hell hereafter, then it is truly and significantly denominated a hard way.

To conclude. 1. How much are sinners deceived in this way!

2. What madness will it be for any to continue in it!

3. It will be impossible for any to be saved who will not quit it.

4. What a mercy that we yet may do so!

5. While we are in the way with the Lord, let us humble ourselves before him, let us return unto him, and sue for his salvation.

IOTA.

XVIII.—*The Backslider filled with his own Ways.*

PROVERBS xiv, 14.

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways."

JESUS CHRIST said, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Can any doubt whether there is a sufficiency of attraction in him to accomplish this? Consider the excellency of his person, consider his love to sinners, consider the pleasures of his service, and the glory of his reward. But with all these charms to allure men, he has as yet no influence over the majority of mankind; and over some, who were once so captivated by his excellency, as to count all things loss for him, he has lost his power. How shall we account for this? Spring whence it will, we may boldly say, that it does not proceed from any change in Jesus, for He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:" and we may as boldly say, that there is not any thing that can justify this defection from the Saviour; and hence it is, that the punishment predicted in the text will be found both just and fearful. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and tremble. The text directs our attention,

I. TO A DISGRACEFUL CHARACTER;—a "backslider in heart."

II. TO HIS FEARFUL PUNISHMENT. He "shall be filled with his own ways."

I. OUR ATTENTION IS DIRECTED TO A DISGRACEFUL CHARACTER;—a "backslider in heart." To backslide, is to recede from an object, as a man walking backward; or a restive horse or bullock running back, or on one side; or as a person or animal turning round, and going back the way he came, instead of going forward. And sometimes it denotes an object losing its virtue, and becoming unprofitable; so it is used, Psa. liii, 3; which passage is quoted by St. Paul, Rom. iii, 12, and rendered gone out of the way, and become unprofitable; that is, gone out of the way of holiness, happiness, and salvation: here it is taken for the most malignant kind of apostasy from the love, fear, service, and worship of God. By backsliding in heart, we generally mean the earliest, the most secret, and the least criminal kind of apostasy; but here it signifies a cool, determined, open,

and inveterate departure from God; in opposition to a sudden, precipitate, and hesitating one, see Psa. xliv, 18. Such a departure from God necessarily supposes a previous and repeated violation of existing obligations and engagements. And this, a declension in our reverence for the Divine Majesty, followed by a declension of love to God, with the reascendancy and preponderancy of earthly affection, springing from too great an attention to earthly things. This is the way of apostasy: such a kind and degree of apostasy as that mentioned in our text would be morally impossible, but by these intermediate steps. But when thoughts are allowed to lodge within us, lust is conceived; then we are enticed or drawn away by lust, just as the fish is drawn out of the water by the bait, or as the youth, mentioned in Prov. vii, 21—23, was drawn in by the harlot. And just in proportion as we are drawn away by lust, the love of God is quenched; and, as that is quenched, lust, having conceived, is enabled to bring forth her infernal offspring, among which sin may be considered as her first-born. She being born and nursed by lust, is in turn enabled to bring forth death, James i, 14, 15. And as Mac Knight justly observes, this is the true genealogy of sin and death. Now conceive of the saint, as thus drawn out of the way of holiness and heaven by lust, and as brought under the power of sin and death; and what condition can be more dreadful? Well might the Saviour, by a strong figure of speech, represent him as not only repossessed by evil spirits, but the possession itself as much more terrible than before. Matt. xii, 43—45. And well might Peter, following his Divine Master, affirm "the last state of such a one to be worse than the first," 2 Pet. ii, 20—22. From the two Scriptures just now referred to, the crime of apostasy is awfully apparent; but that the evils following in its train may be so seen as to make men carefully avoid them, we shall,

II. Proceed to show its fearful punishment;—"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Let no man imagine from what has been said, that it is only apostasy matured that will bring a man to misery: the earliest and least pernicious degrees are attended by very many painful consequences; as the loss of the pleasures, the joys, the comforts, and the tranquillity of religion; as also the support of a good conscience, and all the blessings flowing from the friendship of God; closely following these evils, will be dulness, weakness, increased temptation, and a decrease of divine care. These again will be followed by occasional misgivings, the reproofs of

our own minds, and the revolting of the heart from God; and if this tendency to backslide be cherished, these miserable consequences will be greatly multiplied. But let the apostate proceed to the length that is here named, and all the mischief predicted in the text shall come on his devoted head. He "shall be filled with his own ways." God's paths, though they form a commodious and a highway to the upright, are too strait and incommodious for him; he has got weary of them, and must and will have a path which he can keep, whatever be his company or his conduct. But he will find so much satiety, or so much disappointment, suffering, vexation, and horror in this way, as will make him repent of ever having chosen it; for,

1. Although he has become hardened, and even impudent in sin, and therefore cannot be easily brought, either to feel or blush on its account, yet when he is made to eat of the fruits or effects of his own way, as Solomon words it, Prov. i, 30; and still more when Jehovah's rod shall be stretched over him, and smite him, then will his way distress him, Job xx, 11—29; Prov. xviii, 14. While he was invested with the image of God, he was like a prince in his coronation robes; but now he is in the defilement of his iniquity, and is as a vile person risen up, whose glory is turned into shame. That state of indulgence and libertinism, which was so enchanting in prospect, when experienced in the effects is like poison in the bowels, which tortures and corrupts. It produces the most terrible convulsions in the conscience. Judas was so overcome with them, that to rid himself of them, he hung himself. Was not that a desperate remedy, to throw himself into hell for cure? Apostasy puts gravel in our bread, and wormwood into our cup; it rots our name, consumes our estate, kills and buries our friends, and guides God's flying roll of curses into families and kingdoms, Zech. v, 2—4. But,

2. This is but the beginning of sorrows. Nay, it is but a distant and an indistinct vision of them; or rather, a very distant, and consequently faint report of them: for, after that the sinner has consented to be the perpetual slave of baseness, and has hereby rendered himself the very deformity of ungodliness; after having made himself the sport of delusion, the prey of terror, and a mere wreck of humanity; and after having had his teeth set on edge, by eating the acid fruit of his inglorious and accursed deeds in this world, he shall be driven away in his wickedness, Prov. xiv, 32; and into that condition of being, where his only prospect will be "a certain fearful looking for of judgment." Formerly, a spark of this fire of divine vengeance

fell on him, and caused him to smart; but now he must sink down into this dimensionless and bottomless furnace of fire, to rise no more. No seas, however numerous and extensive, shall contain water enough to quench this raging flame of Jehovah's wrath. Then shall the most atheistical and unbelieving apostates find that they have drawn back into unutterable and remediless perdition. Then shall their expectation perish, Prov. x, 28; and there shall they reap that plenteous harvest, which in the day of their probation they sowed to the flesh, Gal. vi, 7, 8.

IMPROVEMENT.

Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for such as have exchanged the peaceful, honourable, and flowery paths of wisdom, for the ignoble, the miserable, and the destructive paths of apostasy! Oh that my voice might reach to all such, that I might cry, "Turn ye from your evil ways," &c. Have I such a character here? May that God whom thou hast forsaken, give thee to see the things that make for thy peace, before they be for ever hidden from thine eyes! My fellow travellers to Zion, see your danger of apostasy, and with all possible diligence guard against it. "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, by adding to your faith, virtue," &c. And let not those who never had religion, and who therefore are comforting themselves in the thought that they are in no danger of suffering the punishment of apostates,—let not such imagine that no evil awaits them;—destruction and misery are just before you, and without a speedy retreat you will be hurried into them. May God awaken you!

IOTA.

XIX.—*A Divine Claim urged.*

PROV. xxiii, 26.

"My son, give me thine heart."

THE heart was esteemed by the ancients the seat of the affections. Solomon, therefore, may be understood as calling on his disciples to embrace his doctrine, and to follow his injunctions with the warmest affection, and to reduce them to practice without delay. Or rather, we may, without any violation of the text,

consider God as speaking by Solomon to every child of Adam,—Son, daughter, *give me thy heart.* The heart is what God requires; to Him it must be given, or our state will be awful. May the Holy Ghost help us to make a surrender, while we consider the words of our text; in which an awful fact is assumed,—a just and equitable claim made,—and an important duty suggested.

I. WE HAVE AN AWFUL FACT ASSUMED, viz. That the heart is surrendered to a wrong master. This truth, though only assumed in our text is,

1. *Distinctly stated in the sacred Scriptures.* Man is the servant of sin; "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Rom. v, 12. The dominion of sin is universal, both as it relates to the powers of the mind and the family of Adam: the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God, Rom. iii, 9—23. Our Lord has declared, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness," &c, Mark vii, 21, 22. Man is so completely under the control of sin, that in him by nature "dwelleth no good thing," Rom. vii, 18. What reason, conscience, and revelation pronounce good, he does not practise, Rom. vii, 19, 20.

2. *Established by the testimony of God's servants in all ages.* Moses informs us, that soon after the human family begun to multiply, the earth was filled with violence;—all flesh had corrupted its way,—"and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Gen. vi, 5. After the deluge, the same awful statement was made, Gen. viii, 21. Job also declares, that man is abominable and filthy, and "drinketh iniquity like water," Job xv, 16;—it is also corroborated by David and Solomon, Psa. xiv, 3; Prov. xxii, 15; Eccles. ix, 3. The prophets of the Lord speak the same things, Isa. liii. 6, lxiv. 6; Jer. xvii, 1, 9;—and the statement of the apostles is in perfect accordance with the sentiments of their predecessors, Rom. viii, 7, 8; James iii, 15; 1 John v, 19.

3. *Acknowledged in the experience of the pious.* Job says, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," Job xlii, 6; and David, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," Psa. li, 5. Isaiah exclaims, "Wo is me

for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips," chap. vi, 5; and Paul, writing to Titus, chap. iii, 3, observes, "We ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts," &c;—and speaking of himself and the Christians at Ephesus, he says, "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others," Eph. ii, 3.

4. *Confirmed by observation.* Whether we look at Jews, Pagans, or nominal Christians, we see the correctness of this assumed fact. How many live as though they had never to die; and when thoughts of God and religion obtrude on their unwilling minds, every measure which a corrupt heart under Satanic influence can devise, is adopted to drown reflection, and bury thoughts. See the miser—the voluptuary—the debauchee, &c. —what is their life but a practical corroboration of the awful truth we have been considering? Let us therefore notice,

II. THE JUST AND EQUITABLE CLAIM MADE;—"My son," &c. The claimant is God,—the eternal, the everlasting Jehovah; at whose sovereign mandate nations and empires rise and fall, flourish and decay. He claims the *understanding*, that he may enlighten it by his Spirit—the *conscience*, that it may be purged from dead works—the *will*, that it may be brought into subjection to the divine mind—the *affections*, that they may be purified—the *desires*, that they may concentrate in himself—the *memory*, that it may become the depository of divine and useful knowledge; and the whole soul, that we may know, love, and be happy in God for ever. The justice and equity of this claim will appear, when we consider,

1. *That it is the claim of a merciful and gracious Sovereign.* That divine Being, who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords," has given unto man wholesome laws, and enjoined obedience on his subjects; and that obedience not being tendered, God, in infinite mercy, not willing that man should perish, has contrived the plan of reconciliation, 2 Cor. v, 19; and he entreats the rebel to yield affectionate allegiance to his government, and thus be restored to all the advantages of an obedient subject.

2. *A kind Benefactor.* God mercifully imparts to us all the necessaries, comforts, and enjoyments of life, 1 Tim. vi, 17. On him we are absolutely dependant; his hand supplies all our need; he commands the heavens to pour down blessings for our support —the earth to yield her increase for our supply—the sea to enrich us out of her abundance: and is it not just that the dependant should to the utmost of his ability serve his benefactor? Favours conferred, induce obligations; and to do otherwise than

serve God, displays the basest ingratitude, and calls for the heaviest punishment.

3. *An absolute Proprietor.* We are not our own, but the property of another, and he who made us has an unalienable right to all we have and are. "In him we live, and move, and have our being," Acts xvii, 28;—let us not abuse his goodness, or forget that when man sold himself for nought, God bought him with an infinite price, 1 Cor. vi, 30:—and what right can be more valid than that founded on creation, preservation, and purchase?

4. *It is the claim of a Father:* "My *son*, give me thine heart." God sees the prodigal casting off paternal restraint—going from his Father's house—abandoning himself to vice—inflaming his lusts in the maddening flames of inebriety—and seeking death in the error of his life. And his language is, "How can I give thee up?" Hosea xi, 8. "My son! My son!" How affecting the Father's appeal! and will you, can you resist this claim? What! has sin so awfully blinded your eyes and hardened your hearts, that you are proof against the moving appeal in our text?—for once be sober! think how just, how equitable the claim, while we consider,

III. THE IMPORTANT DUTY SUGGESTED IN OUR TEXT; viz. to surrender the heart to God. This we should do,

1. *Voluntarily.* God says, "Give me thine heart." He might say, Thy soul is required of thee; but his language is that of mercy. 'Yield to his love's resistless power'—trifle no longer.

2. *Gratefully.* Review the goodness and mercy of God; meditate on his unparalleled kindness. What love! what compassion has he shown you! Let gratitude animate your minds; let the love of Christ soften your hearts; and with the most lively feelings of thankfulness present to God his own.

3. *Humbly.* "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble," James iv, 6. Humble yourselves therefore in the sight of the Lord, chap. iv, 10, and present to him a lowly contrite heart.

4. *Unreservedly.* Keep back no part of the price; no longer attempt to divide between religion and the world, Matthew xviii, 8, 9. Look at Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v, 3, 4, and read your fate. Is your conduct less criminal? Have you not often acknowledged yourselves the property of another, and will you rob God, or lie to the Holy Ghost?

5. *Believingly.* Christ is the only medium of access to the

Father, and it is by faith in his blood we are saved, Rom. iii, 24—26. Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, are the immutable terms of the gospel, Acts xx, 21.

6. *Immediately.* "Now is the accepted time! behold, now is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. vi, 2. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," Heb. iv, 7. Now, while the Spirit is striving, the claim urged, and attendant angels waiting to carry the tidings to heaven, make a full surrender.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *To the half resolved.* How long halt ye between two opinions?

2. *To the truly penitent.* God says, "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart," Jer. xxix, 13.

3. *To the believer.* "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," Prov. iv, 23.

4. *To the careless.* Shall devils triumph, or God receive his own? Once more, hear the voice of your heavenly Father. "My son, give me thine heart!"

KAPPA.

XX.—*The Nature of God's Commandments, and the Happiness of keeping them.*

ISAIAH xlviii, 18.

"Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

"GODLINESS is profitable unto all things:" and revelation affords no topics that can operate more successfully on the judgments and passions of men, than those in which their duty and interest are represented as being inseparably blended together. Men are usually alive to what they conceive to be their interest: profit presents the most powerful attractions; and even the distant prospect of pleasure reconciles us to a thousand inconveniences, which lie in the way of its attainment. The text is admirably calculated to induce a train of reflections, in

which our duty and happiness, and the interest which God takes in our welfare, are beautifully illustrated.

I. GOD HATH GIVEN TO US COMMANDMENTS;—"Oh that thou hadst hearkened to *my* commandments." These commandments are,

1. *Authoritative in their import.* They are the commandments of JEHOVAH; and they are addressed to us in language that display their high authority. Look at the decalogue. "Thou shalt have no other gods," &c. "Thou shalt not bow down to them," &c. When God in after ages gave commandments to men, through the medium of prophets and apostles, they were uniformly impressed with the sentiment, that they did not speak their own words, but the words of him who sent them, and they announced the divine precepts with a tone of authority, which put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

2. *Perspicuous in their style.* Many things in the Bible are hard to be understood. Magnificent descriptions of the Deity—awfully sublime prophecies—appalling pictures of hell—and glorious representations of heaven; but though the Scriptures describe the most exalted things within the range of human thought, and employ the boldest figures to illustrate them, yet God's commandments are all plain; human language cannot be plainer: "Write the vision and make it plain," &c, Heb. ii, 2. "All the words of my mouth," &c, "are plain to him," &c, Prov. viii, 8, 9. A child may understand them, 2 Tim. iii, 15.

3. *Universal in their application.* They apply to all persons in all circumstances; they know no distinction betwixt the monarch and the beggar; they speak to princes and subjects, to masters and servants, to husbands and wives, to parents and children; and the young and old, the rich and poor, the illiterate and the wise, all come within the sphere of their influence.

4. *Reasonable in their claims.* They enjoin nothing but what is essential to human happiness; they prohibit nothing but what is ruinous to man's best interests. They say, "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God;"—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour." Is not this reasonable? They say, "Let the wicked forsake his way;"—"Cease from doing evil;"—"Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." Does not reason justify all this?

II. GOD'S COMMANDMENTS DESERVE ATTENTION.—"Oh that thou hadst hearkened," &c.

1. *They should be read.* "God at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets." Hence they heard "the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire,"

and it was their business to *hearken:* we have God's commandments written in a book, and our duty binds us to *read;* we are to "search the Scriptures."

They should be understood. Plain as they are, they may be misunderstood. Some were delivered in figurative language: "If thine eye offend thee pluck it out," &c: these must not be interpreted literally. Some in language peculiar to the times; "Take no thought for your life," &c.—"Be careful for nothing," &c: these commandments were not designed to encourage *thoughtlessness*, but to discourage *anxiety*. In seeking to understand the commandments, we should study the design of the writer, the connection in which they stand, and compare them with other commandments; but especially pray for a right judgment in all things.

3. *They should be remembered.* The mere reading, or understanding them will be useless, unless we treasure them up in our memories, and have them fresh in our recollections. "Thy word have I hid in my heart," &c, Psa. cxix, 11. "I will never forget," &c. cxix, 93. In order to remember them, prize them highly, and love them devoutly: whatever has a share in our affection, will find a place in our memories.

4. *They should be practised.* Obedience is all they require; and they should be read, understood, and remembered in reference to practice. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." We should do them *affectionately;* love should be the principle:—*constantly;* all we do should refer to God.

III. ATTENTION TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS PRODUCES THE HAPPIEST RESULTS. "Then had thy peace been as a river," &c. This may be intended to illustrate,

1. *The nature of that tranquillity which the people of God enjoy.* Sinners are at war with God; saints, who keep his commandments, are at peace; they have inward peace, arising from a consciousness of the Divine favour, and peace of conscience. "Peace as a river;" how significant is this figure! Not a torrent or a land flood, which pours down from the neighbouring steep with desolating roar; but a river, whose smooth surface resembles a polished mirror, reflecting the rays of light from its liquid bosom.

2. *Its perpetuity.* A river is an emblem of constancy; pools become fetid and dry up, but rivers flow onward without interruption: "Great peace have they that love thy law," &c, Psa. cxix, 165. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace," &c, Isaiah xxvi, 3. "I will extend peace to her like a river," &c, lxvi, 12.

3. *Its increase.* Rivers become large as they accelerate towards the ocean; additional streams fall into them, and the farther they flow, the deeper is their bed, and the wider are their banks. The privileges of Christians entitle them to expect an increase of peace: new sources of comfort, and new springs of consolation will arise; and the nearer they get to heaven, the greater will their comforts be.

4. "*Thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.*" Righteousness here may refer to the justice or rectitude of the cause in which Israel were engaged; and had they hearkened to God's commandments, they would have borne down all opposition, like the waves of the sea, which no might nor power can withstand; the following verse justifies this sense of the passage, "Thy seed should have been as the sand," &c. Or the "waves of the sea," may be used by a metonymical figure for the sea itself; and then their righteousness may refer to their posterity, being like the sea, occupying an extensive space, and being ever active for the public good.

IV. THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WERE INATTENTIVE TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" &c. This supposes that they had not hearkened; the truth of this is confirmed by 2 Chron. xxxvi, 15, 16; Psalm lxxxi, 11. This conduct was,

1. *Ungrateful.* God was Israel's Benefactor and Saviour; he daily loaded them with his benefits, and he was their Saviour in the time of trouble, but they ungratefully disdained to listen to his commandments.

2. *Rebellious.* God was Israel's King: to them he gave laws, judgments, and testimonies; but their inattention to God's commandments was rebellion against the highest authority.

3. *Unnatural.* God was Israel's Father, Jer. xxxi, 9. And he nourished and brought up children, but they rebelled against him, Isa. i, 2. Children, listen to the instructions of a father, but Israel turned a deaf ear to the voice of God.

4. *Ruinous.* God was Israel's Judge, Isa. xxxiii, 22. Disobedience to his commandments must lead to ruin. Amos iii, 2.

From the subject we learn,

1. *That attention to God's commandments is a highly important duty.* When God commands, man is bound to obey; and "to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man:" the whole of what he is bound to *do*, to *be*, to *enjoy*. Do we attend to these commandments?

2. *Where God's commandments are disregarded, peace is for-*

feited. There may be a fancied peace, an imaginary security, a cry of "peace, peace, when there is no peace." But real peace can have no existence where duty is neglected, Isa. xlviii, 22. Oh what a contrast between the man whose peace flows as a river, and him who is like the troubled sea, &c, Isa. lvii, 20.

3. *That God most compassionately commiserates the circumstances of his creatures.* "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" How wonderful is the compassion of God! How deeply is he concerned for the happiness of his creatures!

4. *That man's final ruin is wholly of himself.* God gives us commandments: these commandments, under the influence of his grace, are practicable: obedience to these commandments leads to peace and glory, Rev. xxii, 14. Where God's commandments are disregarded, it is wholly owing to wilful ignorance, or practical rejection of the grace of God, Prov. i, 24—27.

BETA.

XXI.—*Sinners exhorted and encouraged to seek the Lord.*

ISAIAH lv, 6, 7.

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

IF a minister of the gospel affirms that a great majority of mankind are under the curse of God, and in the road to endless perdition, he is in danger of being accounted censorious and uncharitable. In this case, however, he does not go beyond the apostle, who declared, "The whole world lieth in wickedness:" or farther than the Redeemer himself, who assured his hearers, that "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate," &c. But although the multitude presses on to destruction, God is not to be blamed on account of that misery into which they plunge themselves. On the contrary, he who provides liberally for our bodily necessities, has made provision equally liberal for the salvation of our souls. "He spared not

his own Son; but "sent him" to die, "that the world through him might be saved." He has, in his *written word*, graciously made known the path of life: and his ambassadors not only *propound* to us terms of reconciliation, but *beseech* us to be reconciled, and *warn* us of danger; "Turn ye, for why will ye die?" —They *invite* and *expostulate;* "Ho every one," &c, ver. 1, 2; —They *exhort* and *encourage;* "Seek ye the LORD," &c. Let us therefore consider—

THE EXHORTATION URGED;—"Seek ye the LORD while," &c. In which we may remark—the *object* we are recommended to seek—and the *method* and the *time* of seeking. We notice,

The object recommended;—"The LORD." Here it may be well to premise, the advice supposes a *distance* between God and the sinner; which the latter increases while he continues to walk in *his own* way, and from which he is exhorted to *return:* —not *local* distance; see Psa. cxxxix, 7–10;—for God "compasseth the path" of even the highwayman and the assassin, and the "lying down" of the debauchee and the drunkard, verses 2, 3; and he constantly supplies that life and strength which the wicked abuse, Acts xvii, 25, 28;—but *moral* distance, created by sin, by which man is alienated and separated, and *far off* from God, Col. i, 18; Isa. lix, 2; Eph. ii, 13. The advice moreover supposes that *we need* an acquaintance with the Lord; not as he is in *himself*, Job xi, 7, but as our Saviour. We are *guilty*, and we need the operation of his mercy in *pardon;* are *disordered*, *dark*, &c, and need it to *heal*, *enlighten*, &c; are *immortal*, and therefore need it to furnish us with *an everlasting supply of happiness*. Hence the advice under consideration; in attending to which, we may derive some assistance from analogy. If we had to seek an earthly personage, in order to obtain from him something very important and necessary, we should probably *wait* where he is often found; should *consult his friends* on the subject; and when we had obtained the necessary information, should direct our steps towards him. Now "the LORD loveth the gates of Zion;" we should therefore be found *in his house*. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him:"—to them should we *join ourselves;* and should *approach* him, seeking *heartily*, 1 Chron. xxviii, 9;—*perseveringly*, Matt. xv, 22–28;—and *according to his own direction:*—according to

The method recommended:—"Call ye upon him."—"Let the wicked forsake his way," &c.—In this direction,—*Prayer is enjoined;*—"CALL ye." How disordered is human nature!

Men fear what they should despise, and despise what they should fear;—love what they should hate, &c,—glory in their shame, and are ashamed of their indispensable duty. They are not ashamed to sing the drunkard's song, or to call upon the Lord in *blasphemy* and *imprecation;* but are ashamed of *prayer.* Yet they must pray or perish:—must call in the language of confession, Luke xviii, 22;—of deprecation, Psa. cxliii, 1, 2;—of petition, Psa. li, 1; Luke xv, 19;—not hypocritically or formally, Isa. xxix, 13, 14; but *sincerely*, 1 Chron. xxviii, 9;—when such views of themselves will be given as will induce them to call *humbly*, and in reliance on the sinner's advocate, John xiv, 6. But we should also observe,—*Reformation is enjoined.* "Let the wicked forsake HIS way:"—the way of wickedness that he has *invented*, or that he has *adopted;* at all events, the way of *his choice:*—his way of sinful *pleasure*, or of sinful *profit*, Matt. v, 29, 30. Now whether it be the way of open and headlong *profligacy*, or of criminal *carelessness* and *negligence*, it must be forsaken, Heb. ii, 3. For the reformation required is not superficial, but *radical*, reaching even to the *unrighteous* man's *thoughts.* "God looketh at the *heart;*" and iniquity, if fostered there, will be ruinous, Psalm lxvi, 18. Wherefore "cleanse *your hands, ye sinners;* purify *your hearts, ye double-minded:*" and draw nigh unto God.

The time recommended;—"While he may be found." Does not this intimate, that a period will arrive when he will *not* be found of persons to whom he is *now* accessible? Beyond the present state, there is "neither work nor device" of amendment: and it would seem, that in the case of some persons, their day of trial closes before their day of life does. See Eccles. ix, 10, and Luke xix, 42; Rom. i, 28; 2 Thess. ii, 11. Therefore call upon the Lord "*while he is near.*" This is just the advice you would give me if I were standing in your company, and you knew that I wanted to speak with a third person, who should happen to be walking from us, and, of course, becoming less near every step he took. 'This is your opportunity,' you would say, 'embrace it, call to him.' The passage furnishes ground for a warm address to *the young*, whose consciences are tender, and their hearts susceptible of good and generous impressions;—to those who *enjoy favourable circumstances* for religious reading, hearing, conversation, &c;—and especially to such as now feel the *strivings of the Holy Spirit.* "Behold now is the accepted time."—Behold,

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN. Mark how strong the

assurance,—"He WILL have mercy—He WILL pardon." Here is sufficient intimation that

The nature of God warrants this encouragement. Hear the prophet, "He *delighteth* in mercy," Micah vii, 18. Hear the blessed Redeemer himself, "But love your enemies,"—"as your Father also is merciful," Luke vi, 35, 36.

The word of God warrants this encouragement. Besides our text, look at Isa. i, 18, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow," &c. And

The past dealings of God with sinners warrant this encouragement. Manasseh, who was a wretched idolater, and who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood,—the thief on the cross, who acknowledged that he suffered justly,—and Saul the persecutor, who was exceeding mad against the saints,—were induced to "*seek* the Lord;" and he was found of them. And among *backsliders*, for the encouragement of such unhappy souls as have *forsaken* "the fountain of living waters," &c,—David, who became guilty of adultery and murder; and Peter, who denied his Master with oaths and curses; on their "*return* unto the Lord," found that "He will *abundantly* (multiply to) pardon;" will *repeat* his pardoning acts to the seeking penitent. "For his hand is not shortened," &c.—"Therefore let us come boldly," &c; Isa. lix, 1, Heb. iv, 14—26.

We may *apply* this subject to check *presumption*, and to prevent *despair:* and thus prevent the operation of two deadly evils.

1. *To check presumption.* Who is he that presumes to sin because that God offers pardon to the penitent? Do you presume on such texts as this? But the promise is only to those who *forsake* sin; and you have little more right to it than Satan himself. But perhaps you venture to sin on now, on the presumption of repentance at a future time. There is nothing in *nature* to authorize this:—nature teaches us that *evil* habits are *strengthened* and *confirmed*, as well as produced, by practice. Of course, the longer you continue in sin, the more difficult and unlikely will reformation become. There is nothing in Scripture to authorize it. The Lord does indeed advise, Jer. vi, 16, —and complain, Hos. xi, 8—but he also threatens, Proverbs i, 24—27.

2. *To prevent despair;* into which Satan endeavours to drive those whom he cannot ruin through presumption. Is there a penitent, who asks with the Psalmist, "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" &c, Psa. lxxvii, 7—9. Judging of him according to

the measure of man's patience and mercy, we might so conclude. But he will *pardon abundantly;* beyond your *merits* and your *fears*, Isa. lv, 8, 9; Matt. xi, 28; John vi, 37.

ZETA.

XXII.—*Purity necessary to Salvation.*

JEREMIAH iv, 14.

"Oh Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"

WHEN Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office, the moral state of the Jews was awfully degenerate and deplorable. As a nation, they had forsaken "the fountain of living water," and abandoned themselves to idolatry and every species of wickedness. Their defection and disobedience greatly displeased the God of their fathers, and caused him to chastise them for their impiety, and permit them to be carried captives into Babylon, under the galling yoke of their enemies. But previous to that calamitous event, the Lord sent his servants the prophets, to give them timely warning, and exhort them to immediate repentance. Such was manifestly the import and design of Jeremiah's commission, which he faithfully executed, in the midst of opposition and extreme discouragement. In the text and context he earnestly entreats the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea to return unto the Lord their God as the only way to be preserved from the *tyranny* of their enemies, and cleansed from the *impurity* of their iniquities;—"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart," &c. But these words will strictly apply to mankind universally, as fallen and polluted sinners; and explicitly suggest and declare the natural depravity of the human heart—the spiritual purity which the Lord requires—and the absolute necessity of personal holiness. Let us observe,

I. THE NATURAL DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN HEART;—"Wash thine *heart* from wickedness." By the *heart*, we may here understand all the faculties of the soul, and passions of the mind; and by the "*wickedness* of the heart," the total corruption and moral defilement of human nature. But this doctrine is frequently misrepresented, and often denied, and must therefore be explained and proved; as a position founded in *truth*, and confirmed by *evidence*.

1. *This doctrine requires definition.* When we maintain that man by nature is *wholly* depraved, and destitute of all spiritual goodness, we do not mean to deny that he may not be endued with some *comparative* and *moral* excellencies of natural disposition and mental attainments. It is evident, from a very partial acquaintance with mankind, that many in their natural state possess highly intelligent minds, liberal sentiments, amiable tempers, and benevolent hearts; but no man by nature is *spiritually good*, or pleasing to God. All are deeply fallen, polluted, and prone to every evil thought, word, and work, Eph. ii, 3. This depravity of the heart includes *the entire absence of the divine image.* God made man originally in his own likeness, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; but through sin we have become ignorant, corrupt, and ungodly, both in heart and life, Rom. iii, 12—18; Eph. iv, 18.—*A natural aversion to God and godliness.* Hence there is in the unregenerate heart a deep rooted dislike and hatred to the purity of religion, and the sacred exercises of spiritual devotion, which fully proves that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Col. i, 21.—*A universal propensity or disposition to evil.* The mind, the will, the conscience, and the affections, are altogether alienated from God, and *naturally* inclined to resist his truth, and indulge in all the polluted habits of vice, and unhallowed pleasures of sin. Such is the *original* degeneracy and internal wickedness of every human being by nature, Job xv, 16; John iii, 6; Rom. i, 29—32. But,

2. *This doctrine demands evidence.* It is sometimes much easier to state a position, than to prove it; but in the case before us, the latter is no more difficult than the former. It is so obvious a truth, that man is a fallen and sinful creature, that it cannot be denied without a manifest contempt of reason, violation of conscience, and rejection of Scripture.—*It is divinely revealed.* It is explicitly taught by Moses and the prophets, and by Jesus Christ and his apostles. They are perfectly unanimous in their sentiments and representations of this humiliating subject. They assure us that "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually;—the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;—from within, out of the heart of man, proceedeth all evil;—that which is born of the flesh is flesh;—the body of sin shall be destroyed, even the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," &c, Mark vii, 20-23.—*It is practically exemplified.* In every age and

nation, "the wickedness of man has been great in the earth." The heathen moralists acknowledged the fact, but could not account for its origin and prevalence. Revelation, however, explains the subject; and the various afflictions and miseries to which human nature is incident, fully demonstrate that we are "children of wrath, shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin."—*It is deeply lamented.* The pious sincerely mourn over "the flesh which lusteth against the spirit," and earnestly desire and pray for its utter destruction; that they may be "redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto the Lord a peculiar people," Psa. li, 2, 3, 7. As closely connected with the doctrine of moral depravity, we may consider,

II. THE SPIRITUAL PURITY WHICH THE LORD REQUIRES;—"O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness,—how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" This affectionate and impressive address is highly instructive, and evidently implies,

1. *The possibility of obtaining purity of heart.* If it were impossible, the exhortation would be superfluous and vain; but it certainly is attainable, and therefore ought to be earnestly desired, and diligently sought. This will appear *from the design of redemption;* which was to "open a fountain for sin and uncleanness, and to purge our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God," Heb. ix, 13, 14; 1 Pet. i, 18, 19.—*From the ability of the Saviour;* who, by the characters he sustains, and the offices which he executes, is infinitely qualified to "save unto the uttermost, and redeem his people from all their iniquities," John i, 16; 1 Cor. i, 30.—*From the promises of Scripture,* in which the Lord engages freely and fully to save them that believe, "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," Ezek. xxxvi, 26, 27; 1 Pet. i, 4.—And *from the experience of believers;* whose hearts are purified by faith, "as vessels unto honour," sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and "prepared unto every good work," Rom. vi, 22; 1 John i, 7.

2. *The important duty of seeking purity of heart.* "O Jerusalem! wash thine heart," &c. This exhortation or command does not imply that we can cleanse ourselves from the stains of iniquity, but simply inculcates an immediate and diligent use of the means of grace, as necessary to obtain salvation, Ezek. xviii, 31. That "our hearts may be washed from wickedness," *we must repent of our sins:* for without repentance there is no forgiveness, nor peace with God, Isa. lv, 7; Acts iii, 19.—*We must*

believe in Jesus Christ; for it is only by faith that we can realize an interest in his redeeming benefits, and participate the cleansing efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, Acts xxvi, 18; Heb. xii, 24. —*We must give ourselves unto prayer;* for the Lord will be inquired of for every blessing; and hence we should humbly and fervently pray, that we may be "washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," Psa. li, 10; 1 Thess. v, 23.—*We must also seek the Lord without delay;* for, "how long," saith the Almighty, "shall thy vain," wicked, unbelieving, and impenitent "thoughts lodge within thee?"—O Jerusalem! O sinners! cleanse your hands and purify your hearts in the blood of the Lamb, for now is the day of salvation, Isa. lv, 6; 2 Cor. vi, 2. This duty is strongly enforced by,

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL HOLINESS;—"That thou mayest *be saved.*" Purity and happiness are inseparable. We are saved by being *purified;* and hence said Christ to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

1. *Personal holiness is a necessary property of religion.* It is very possible to assume the profession and form of godliness, whilst we are entire strangers to its vital energy and power. And it is to be feared that many rest in the *letter*, without the *spirit* of Christianity; and have a name to live, while they are *spiritually* dead. But pure and undefiled religion does not consist in the barren speculations of the deluded enthusiast, nor in the external ceremonies of the formal professor, Gal. vi, 15; it principally resides in the *heart*, enlightening, enriching, and hallowing every power of the soul unto the Lord; and directing every desire, disposition, and pursuit, to the glory of his name, 1 Cor. vi, 19, 20: 1 Pet. i, 15, 16. Without this *internal purity* and spirituality of mind, the profession of religion is an empty parade, and can profit us nothing, Rom. xiv, 17.

2. *Personal holiness is a necessary meetness for heaven.* Reason teaches us that there must be a similarity and agreement between the *faculty* of enjoyment and the *object* enjoyed. Now God is essentially just and holy, and therefore can never be the *portion* of impenitent and unholy souls. The Scriptures also assure us, that "without holiness no man can see the Lord;" "for nothing that defileth, or maketh a lie, can in any wise enter into the kingdom of God," Mat. v, 8; 1 Cor. vi, 9, 10. Deliverance from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin, is a doctrine uniformly taught by divine revelation,—is personally confirmed in the experience of the saints,—and is absolutely necessary to obtain complete and eternal *salvation* in the world to come

These reflections should excite deep humility and self-abasement as fallen sinners, and promote an earnest application to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, whose "blood cleanseth from all unrighteousness."

ETA.

XXIII. *The good old Way.*

JEREMIAH vi, 16.

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

IT is the Lord that speaks in our text, and when he speaks, it is both our duty and interest to obey his voice. It is our *duty;* for he is our rightful governor: "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." His hands have made and fashioned us, and we should therefore pray for understanding that we may learn his commandments. It is our *interest* to obey the Lord; because the way of holy obedience is the only way to escape eternal misery: "for unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" will be certainly rendered by the righteous Judge of all. To obey the Lord is also conducive to our happiness; for he is the Lord our God, who teaches us to profit: and in consequence of hearkening to his commandments, our peace will flow as a river. The work of righteousness is peace; and all the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness. This is confirmed by the declaration in our text, "Stand ye in the way, and see," &c. That we may seek and find the rest thus promised, let us consider,

I. THE WAY HERE RECOMMENDED. Here observe,

1. *The way itself;* called the good old way. This cannot be the way of the wicked; for their way is not a good one, Psa. xxxvi, 4. Neither is it the way of peace and rest, Isa. lvii, 20, 21. It must be the way of *Scriptural piety;* that way prescribed by God in his word, Psa. cxix, 1, 165. This way, we find represented by St. Paul as comprising, "faith that worketh by love," Gal. v, 6. *Faith in Christ*, or *receiving* him in all his offices, as our Teacher, Sovereign, Redeemer, and Benefactor, Matt. xi, 28—30; John *i*, 12; and *walking* in him as we have

received him, Col. ii, 6. *And love as the fruit and effect of this faith*, 1 Tim. i, 5. This charity includes love to God and all mankind, Matt. xxii, 36—39. And this love is the sum of all God's moral precepts, Rom. xiii, 10; Matt. xxii, 40.

2. *This course of faith and love is called a way.* It is so called, because it *leads* to the enjoyment of *eternal life*, Matt. vii, 14; Psa. xxxvii, 34.—It is the *certain* way to eternal life, Rom. ii, 7; Psa. lxxxiv, 11.—And it is the *only* way to eternal life, Heb. xii, 14; Matt. vii, 21.

3. *It is called the old way.* This it certainly is with regard to us, because it is at least as old as the *reformation.* This is incontestable, when we appeal to the history and the writings of all our most renowned divines, through whose instrumentality the reformation was so happily effected.—It is as old as *Christianity.* This is evident from the doctrine of our Lord himself. John xiv, 1, and xv, 12, and of all his apostles. Witness Paul, in those passages above referred to; Peter, 2 Pet. i, 5—7; and John, 1 John iii, 23.—It is as old as the *Mosaic dispensation.* For Moses himself was actuated by faith, Heb. xi, 24—27. And he repeatedly taught the way of love, both towards God and man, Deut. vi, 45; Lev. xix, 18.—It is as old as the *patriarchal ages*: as the days of Noah, Heb. xi, 7; as the days of Enoch, Gen. v, 24; Heb. xi, 5; as the days of Adam, Heb. xi, 4. And it must have been as old even as the days of Adam, when in a state of innocence: for he was made upright, Eccles. vii, 29; and as such, he could not but believe in God and love him.

4. *It is called the good way:* and this it evidently is, because *those who walk in it are good*, James iii, 17; Eph. v, 8, 9.—Because *those who walk in it do good.* They prove general blessings to their *families*, Deut. v, 29; to their *country*, Proverbs xiv, 34; and to the *world* at large, Mat. v, 13, 14.—And because the *way itself is good.* It is good in its *origin*, being prescribed by infinite goodness, Psa. cxliii, 10; and it is good in its *tendency*, leading to the happiest results, Prov. xix, 23. That we may enjoy the benefits of this way, let us consider,

II. God's COMMANDS RESPECTING IT;—"Stand ye in the ways," &c.

1. *Stand ye in the ways and see.* In this part of God's counsel, some facts are assumed, and some duties are enjoined.—*Some facts are evidently assumed:* as that though there is but *one good* way, yet there are *many evil* ways; for instance, there are the ways of open and secret sin, of irreligion, of self-confidence, formality, and apostasy.—That *all* mankind by nature are walk-

ing in *some* evil ways, Isa. liii, 6.—That we are naturally *ignorant* of the good old way, Jer, x. 23.—And that in the use of proper means we are capable both of *discovering* it, and *walking* in it. Hence we find in this counsel,—*Some duties evidently enjoined*. "Stand ye in the ways, and see."—*Satan;* make an immediate *pause* for the purpose of *consideration*, Hag. i, 5.—And *see;* seriously *examine* in what way you are walking. Is it in the way of outward or secret sin? or irreligion? or self-confidence? or formality? or apostasy? "Let every man prove his own work," 2 Cor. xiii, 5. Observe well the *tendency* of every evil way. Look before you, and consider whither it leads; it ends in death, Rom. vi, 21.

2. *Ask for the old paths: where is the good way?* Inquire—By *searching the Scriptures*, John v, 39. This is the *map* that describes it.—By *asking direction of God;* who is ready to give it, James i, 5; Prov. ii, 3–5.—By *associating with the pious;* who are walking in it, Prov. xiii, 20.

3. *And walk therein.* This command requires you—*To get into it.* Do not remain out of it by delay, Job xxii, 21; and xxxvi, 18. Do not stop short of it, by resting in deficient attainments: as merely talking of it, thinking aright concerning it, and desiring it. Get into it, by coming to Christ as he invites you, Matt. ii, 29; and by coming to God by him, John xiv, 6; Heb. vii, 25.—*To keep in it*, by steadfast resistance of temptation, 1 Pet v. 8, 9; Luke xxi, 36.—And *to go forward in it*, by improving in piety, 2 Cor. vii, 1; 2 Pet. i, 5—11. Having considered God's command respecting this way, observe,

III. THE PROMISE BY WHICH HE ENCOURAGES US TO OBEY HIM;—"And ye shall find rest for your souls." Here observe,

1. *The blessing promised;*—"Rest for your souls." *Rest—gracious rest in this world;*—from the anguish of guilt, Isa. xii, 5;—from the oppression of Satan, Matt. xi, 28;—from tormenting fears, Psa. xxxiv, 4;—from inward defilement, John xv, 2: 1 John i, 9;—and rest in the pleasant service of a beloved master, Matt. xi, 30; 1 John v, 3.—*Glorious rest in heaven*, Heb. iv, 9;—from all temptation, Job iii, 17: from all suffering, Rev. xxi, 4:—and from all danger, Matt. vi, 20.—Rest for your souls. Rest attended with *consciousness* of enjoyment in this life, Rom. viii, 1, 2; and after death, Rev. vii, 14, 17. Rest, such as your souls require, because it is *eternal*, Psa. xvi, 11.

2. *The certainty of our obtaining it;*—"Ye *shall* find rest for your souls." On your seeking it as God requires, it is certain, from God's *all-sufficiency:* he who promises it is the Lord, who

has it to give, Gen. xiv, 22.—From his *kindness:* he calls you to enjoy it, Isa. xlv, 19;—and from his *truth:* he engages that you shall find it, 1 Thess. v, 24.

APPLICATION.

These words teach us the falsehood of some common objections to a course of piety; as,

1. "*That this strict religion is a new way!*" No, it is the old way: sin is the new way, devised by Satan, for the purpose of leading men to hell.

2. "*That it is an injurious way, unfavourable to the interests of mankind!*" No, it is the good way, and most highly beneficial, 1 Tim. iv, 8; Prov. xii, 36.

3. "*That it is a melancholy way!*" No, it is the way of peace and rest: peace through life, Luke i, 78, 79; peace in death, Psa. xxxvii, 37; and rest for ever, Rev. xiv, 13.

ALPHA.

XXIV.—*The Nature and Prosperity of the Messiah's Reign.*

JER. xxiii, 5.

"A King shall reign and prosper."

WHEN Christ joined his two disciples on their way to Emmaus, it is said, that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself:" for though every feature in the Redeemer's character, and many of the prominent actions of his life, were distinctly referred to in the prophetic Scriptures, yet these writings assumed a mysterious aspect, partly by the highly figurative style in which they were delivered, and partly by the different views which the prophets took of the Messiah, and the various events of his life to which their attention was directed. Sometimes they view him in the depth of his humiliation; and then they describe him as a man of sorrows; as wounded, and bruised, and afflicted; as stricken and smitten of God, and cut off out of the land of the living, Isa. liii. At others, they behold him in his eternal power and godhead, as being exalted, and extolled, and very high; as sprinkling many nations, and, like a

mighty conqueror, dividing the portion with the great, and the spoil with the strong. Jeremiah, in the passage before us, describes the Messiah in these distinct and dissimilar parts of his character: "Behold, saith the Lord, I will raise unto David a righteous Branch:—a Branch, to designate his human nature, being raised up unto David, to show that Christ was the seed of David according unto the flesh;—a righteous Branch, to describe him as being essentially righteous in himself, and the source of righteousness to all believers. The prophet then, directing his attention to the extent of the Messiah's spiritual dominion, adds, and "a King shall reign and prosper," &c. The character of Christ—the nature of his reign—and the prosperity with which that reign shall be attended, are the subjects which the text presents to our view.

I. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST. "A King," &c. There is no title more frequently used by the inspired writers, in describing the Messiah, than that of a King; see Num. xxiv, 17; Psa. ii, 6, xlv, 1; Isa. xxxii, 1; Zech, ix, 9; Luke xix, 38; John xviii, 37; Rev. xvii, 14. There are three things we look for in a king.

1. *Supreme power.* A king is supposed to be above all—a chief, or head; and all around him are considered as being inferior and subordinate: and though this supremacy in reference to an earthly monarch is more in idea than in reality, more the effect of office than of nature, yet, as it regards Christ, he is really and properly above all; not only above all men, "but far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name," &c, Eph. i, 21. "He is over all, God blessed for ever," Rom. ix, 5; Phil. ii, 9; Col. i, 18.

2. *Legislative authority.* That is, a right to enact equitable laws for the government of his subjects. Christ possesses that authority in such a high and exalted manner as no monarch ever did or ever can. His authority to govern all, arises out of his being the proprietor of all. "The world was made by him," John i, 10; "All things were created by him, and for him," &c, Col. i, 16. His legislative authority is still more confirmed by virtue of his redeeming acts: he has bought us with a price, and redeemed us to God by his blood. This world may be considered as a rebellious province of Jehovah's dominions, where we have all revolted from our lawful Sovereign, and are all condemned to death; but Christ undertook our ransom, and "died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Hence he possesses a sovereign authority over his redeemed people.

3. *Righteous administration.* Or the exercise of certain qualities essential to good government. Without wisdom, the reign of an earthly monarch would be a reign of folly; without justice it would only serve to tolerate licentiousness; and without mercy to temper his administrations, his government would be marked with terror and absolute despotism. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: he knows all his subjects—is acquainted with their infinitely diversified necessities: And such is his immaculate purity, that it is impossible for him to enact any laws that will not subserve the interests of his creatures. His justice is equal to his wisdom: justice and judgment are the habitation of his seat. And he is so merciful as to be "touched with the feelings of our infirmities:"—"a bruised reed shall he not break," &c, Matt. xii, 20.

II. THE NATURE OF HIS REIGN:—"A King shall *reign*," &c.

1. *The reign of Christ is spiritual.* The immediate seat of his government is the human spirit; it is there he carries his triumphs, there he erects his throne, and there he establishes his kingdom: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," &c, Luke xvii, 20. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv, 17. And as these are spiritual graces, the reign of Christ, by which these are established, must be spiritual. This serves to reprove the folly of those who place the whole of their religion in a splendid round of duties, while they continue total strangers, to that inward light which illuminates the understanding, and that spiritual energy that transforms the whole character.

2. *The reign of Christ is benevolent.* Look at the Alexanders, or Cæsars, or mighty chiefs of antiquity, marching at the head of vast armies, while every battle of these warriors is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood. How violent their operations! how cruel and sanguinary their triumphs! Oh, how unlike the means used by the Lord Jesus to subdue the world to the obedience of himself! See him enter on his glorious embassy, without arms, without wealth or worldly influence! "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," Isa. xlii, 2. Observe the doctrines which he preached, and the disciples and apostles whom he sent to plant the standard of his cross in the world. Here was no force, nor violence, nor menaces, used to make a willing people in the day of his power.

3. *The reign of Christ is equitable.* It is founded on principles of justice, reason, and truth: "A sceptre of righteousness

is the sceptre of his kingdom," Heb. i, 8. The laws by which he governs are holy, just, and good: the obedience which he requires, is not only right in itself, but essentially connected with human happiness. He prohibits nothing but what is ruinous to our best interests; he enjoins nothing but what tends to dignify and exalt human beings to a state of immortal blessedness.

4. *The reign of Christ is perpetual.* Earthly kingdoms have their rise, progress, perfection, declension, and ruin; but "of the increase of Christ's government and kingdom there shall be no end," Isa. ix, 7; "His throne is for ever and ever," Heb. i, 8.

III. THE PROSPERITY WITH WHICH THAT REIGN SHALL BE ATTENDED. The word *prosper* is always used in a favourable sense. To prosper as a king, implies,

1. *To have an increase of willing subjects.* And with this prosperity Christ's government shall be attended. We infer this from what has been already done. In the primitive ages, the cause of Christ was like a grain of mustard seed; now it is become a great tree. It was a little leaven; it is now leavening the whole lump. A handful of corn, sown upon the tops of the mountains; now the fruit shakes like Lebanon. The advocates of Christ were at first few, confined to one part of the globe, and of no repute; now they are many, widely diffused, and in many cases found in the higher circles of society. Infer it from the prophecies which describe the increase of Christ's kingdom and government as having no end. Infer it from the means adopted by Christian societies and congregations to win souls to Christ—Bible societies, Tract societies, Missionary societies, and other benevolent institutions, whose sole object is to extend the kingdom of Christ.

2. *To have adequate provision for the supply of all their wants.* Our heavenly King possesses infinite treasures of grace and glory. He who fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, can multiply our provision: and in reference to our spiritual wants, there is bread enough in our Father's house, and to spare.

3. *To secure their real happiness.* Christ's subjects are all happy—by the indulgence of benevolent dispositions—by the conformity to righteous laws—by the practice of holy duties—by the anticipation of future felicities. How descriptive are the prophecies on this subject, Psa. lxxii, 7, 8; Isa. xi, 4—9, lii, 9.

4. *To subjugate or destroy his enemies.* The implacable enemies of Christ shall be destroyed, Psa. ii, 9, 12; Isa. lx, 12,

But as Christ came not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved, he is employing means to conquer its prejudice, and slay its enmity. His messengers are going forth, charged with the ministry of reconciliation; his word runneth very swiftly; his enemies are falling before him; and sinners are asking their way to Zion, &c.

In conclusion observe,

1. If Christ shall reign and prosper, how great is the folly and madness of infidels, skeptics, and sinners of all descriptions, who attempt to prop the tottering throne of infidelity!

2. This subject should inspire the souls of Christ's devoted subjects with joy and gladness. The prophets rejoiced in the distant prospect of the Messiah's reign: the conversion of the Gentiles caused great joy, &c, Acts xv, 3. Angels rejoice over repenting sinners. And the heavenly inhabitants, as the voice of many waters, and mighty thunderings, are saying, "Let us be glad," &c, Rev. xix, 6, 7. And shall not Christians rejoice to know that Christ shall reign and prosper?

3. Most of all, we should do our utmost to extend the triumphs of the Redeemer's government. Christ allows of no neutrals: "He that is not with me is against me." Let us pray, "Thy kingdom come." Let us send ambassadors to the heathen. Let us do what we can in our families and in our neighbourhood to save souls from death.

BETA.

XXV.—*The Salvation of Sinners desired by God.*

EZEKIEL xxxiii, 11.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," &c.

IT is evident from the uniform conduct of Ezekiel, that he well understood, and faithfully discharged his duty, as a watchman unto the house of Israel. To this office God had appointed him, verses 7—9; and, in the execution of it, he plainly set before his people both their sin and their danger. But the house of Israel, being hardened in transgression, hated reproof, and endeavoured to evade the force of it, by casting the blame of their sin and misery upon God himself. This they did in effect, by the plea of necessity, verse 10. "If our transgres-

sions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how then shall we live?" As if they had said, 'Our case is hopeless, for it appears that God has decreed our destruction; and if we sin and suffer by the decree of God, how then can we be blamed? can we alter his purpose, and live when God has doomed us to die?' This impious reflection on God he strongly resents, and fully proves the injustice of it, in the language now before us: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, oh house of Israel?" These words lead us to observe,

I. THE STATE OF MANKIND AS SINNERS. Here we learn that it is,

1. *A state of moral evil.* They walk in evil ways. By the term "*way*," is meant a course of moral conduct, including the habitual actions, words, and thoughts of mankind, Isa. liii, 6. The plural term "*ways*" is here employed, to intimate that the courses pursued by sinners are *various* in their kinds. They are ways of *rebellion*, or opposition to God's authority: they are open and avowed, such as St. Paul describes, 1 Cor. vi, 9, 10; Gal. v, 19—21; or they are secret and concealed, such as our Lord describes, Mark vii, 21—23. There are ways of *impenitence*, or contempt of God's mercy: in which God is forgotten, Jer. ii, 32; and not sought, Psa. x, 4, cvii, 10, 11. There are ways of *self-deception*, or vain delusive hope, Prov. xiv, 12: such is the way of self-righteousness, Jer. xvii, 5, 6; Isa. i, 11; and such also is the way of Antinomianism, Prov. xxx, 12; Matt. vii, 21; Heb. xii, 14. But all their ways are *evil*, however diversified. They are evil—because they are *iniquitous*: contrary to the rule of rectitude, 1 John iii, 4.—Because they are *painful*: occasioning present misery, Prov. xv, 19; Jer. ii, 19.—Because they are *destructive*: leading to certain ruin, Ezek. xviii, 30; Rom. vi, 21. Hence, our text assures us that the state of mankind as sinners, is

2. *A state of imminent danger*:—a state in which they are certainly exposed to *death*, even to eternal death, Rom. vi, 23. By eternal death is meant the punishment inflicted on sinners in a future state, Rev. xxi, 8. This punishment is called death—*not because it implies annihilation*; for the wicked still live, when they leave this world. Their continued existence is evident from their state *before* judgment, Luke xvi, 23, 24; from their sentence *at* judgment, Matt. xxv, 41—46; and their tor

ment *after* judgment, Rev. xiv, 10, 11.—But this punishment is called death, *because in it there is some resemblance to natural death.* To omit other circumstances, the subjects of natural death are separated from the society of the living, and become the prey either of worms or of fire. Are the subjects of natural death removed from the society of the living? so the subjects of eternal death are *banished* from the presence of God, and of those who live to him, 2 Thess. i, 7—9; Matt. xiii, 40—42. Are the subjects of natural death the common prey either of worms or of fire? This they are, according to the different customs of different countries; some being committed to the silent grave, and some being consumed on the funeral pile. Thus also the subjects of eternal death are represented as being preyed on both by the *worm* and the *fire*, Mark ix, 43, 44. Their worm is an *accusing conscience*, which condemns them as being the authors of their own misery, Jer. iv, 18. The worms of the grave indeed, though dreaded, are not *felt*, and soon *die;* but this worm *never dies*, and the torture it inflicts must be endless. The fire that consumes the bodies on the funeral pile is only a *material fire*, kindled by feeble *mortals*, and must soon become *extinct;* but the fire of hell, if not material, must be something much more dreadful: it is kindled by the wrath of *God*, Isa. xxx, 33; and will *never* be quenched, Matt. iii, 12. However, the state of sinners in this world, though alarming, is not yet hopeless. Let us therefore observe,

II THEIR DUTY AND PRIVILEGE AS SINCERE PENITENTS.

1. *Their duty.* This is, to turn from their evil ways;—"Turn ye," &c. Turn from your ways of *rebellion*, by entire *reformation*, Isa. lv, 7; Ezek. xviii, 27—Turn from your ways of *impenitence*, by earnest *prayer*, Hos. xiv, 1, 2; Luke xviii, 13.—Turn from your ways of *self-deception*, by coming to God, trusting in Christ's mediation, John xiv, 6; and by seeking a new creation, Gal. vi, 16; Psa. li, 10.—Turn *seasonably:* without delay, Isa. lv, 6; Job. xxii, 21.—Turn *perpetually:* without defection, Jer. l, 5.—Turn *believingly:* in confident expectation of salvation, Heb. x, 19—22. That as gospel penitents your confidence may be strengthened, observe,

2. *Their privilege.* This is, to be *saved from death*, and *enjoy life*—To *be saved from death*, Ezek. xviii, 28. All genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ are saved from death by being delivered from the dominion of spiritual, and the sentence of eternal death, John xi, 25, 26. By means of this salvation from death, they are brought also—*To enjoy life.* The life enjoyed

by them is comprehensive; including an interest in God's manifested favour, Psa. xxx, 5, lxiii, 3;—actual devotedness to God's service, Rom. vi, 13;—and the eternal possession of heaven, Rom. ii, 6, 7. Observe,

3. *The attainment of this privilege is as certain as it is desirable.* It is certain, from God's earnest *command;* "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." This interests you in God's sincerity, Isa. xlv, 19.—It is certain, from God's solemn *oath;* "As I live, saith the Lord," &c. This interests you in God's *veracity*, Heb. vi, 18.—It is certain, from God's gracious *expostulation;* "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" This interests you in God's most affectionate regard. Almost every word in this kind expostulation emphatically expresses the great concern of God for the salvation of mankind. These words, therefore, "Why will ye die?" most forcibly suggest the most direct and distinct APPLICATION of our text.

1. *Why will ye* DIE? By continuing in sin, you choose death, the worst of all evils; and eternal death, which is the worst of all deaths. Carelessly to squander away your earthly goods and possessions is bad; to impair and destroy your health is worse; to waste and murder your time is worse still: for 'Time destroyed, is suicide: where more than blood is spilt.'—But to plunge your immortal souls into death eternal, is the very worst of crimes; for this is murder, self-murder, and even self-murder of the blackest description: it is an exploit of *wickedness* which can never be forgiven, and for which no atonement was ever made.

2. WHY *will ye die?* By what arguments can you justify your conduct at the bar of your own consciences? Is not God a better master than the devil? Is not holiness better employment than sin? Are not the treasures of grace and heaven better enjoyments than hell and damnation? Is not the pursuit of life more rational and more conducive to happiness than the pursuit of death?—If it be, then in choosing death instead of life, your *folly* is as great as your wickedness. Every sinner therefore may justly exclaim with Saul;—"I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly," 1 Sam. xxvi, 21.

3. *Why will* YE *die?*—Ye *men!* concerning whom there is still hope of salvation. You are not devils, for whom a Redeemer was never provided; you are not lost souls in hell, who are out of the reach of Divine mercy: Christ still seeks you, that he may save you, Rev. iii, 20.—Ye *Britons!* the peculiar favourites of heaven; who enjoy the clearest gospel light, the

greatest religious liberty, and the highest advantages for piety, in the richest abundance, Psa. cxlvii, 20.—Ye professing *Christians!* who are called by the name of Christ, and are encouraged in his word to seek him, 2 Chron. vii, 14; who are baptized in the name of Christ, and bound by the most solemn vows to serve him alone, Eccl. v, 4.—Ye *Protestants!* who are delivered from, and protest against the pernicious errors which have crept into the visible church of Christ; if you continue in sin, your *inconsistency* will be as great as your wickedness and your folly; and when judged at the bar of God, you must be found without excuse, Matt. xxii, 12, 13.

4. *Why* WILL *ye die?* Remember, if thou die eternally, it must be because you *will* die; your death must be the result of your own deliberate choice; for *God wills your salvation.* This is evident, not only from his word and oath here recorded, but also from his *longsuffering*, 2 Pet. iii, 9;—from the *tears* of Christ over perishing sinners, Matt. xxiii, 37; Luke xix, 41, 42;—and from his being *given* to die in our stead, Rom. viii, 32. And *Divine grace renders you capable of seeking salvation*, with the utmost certainty of success, Phil. ii, 12, 13. Then *resolve* with the prodigal;—"I will arise," &c, Luke xv, 18, 19. Imitate David in resolute *promptitude*, Psa. cxix, 59, 60. And confidently *hope* with Micah, Mic. vii, 18, 19.

ALPHA.

XXVI.—*Spiritual Husbandry.*

HOSEA X, 12.

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground."

THE figurative language of Scripture is admirably suited to the communication of those ideas which its inspired authors wished to convey. Subjects, which would puzzle the wisest men adequately to describe in their abstract and physical nature, are by means of the apt, chaste, and elegant figures of sacred Scripture, brought down to the comprehension of the meanest capacity, Isa. xxxv, 8; and if the human heart was not by nature, and by the reiterated commission of crime, rendered hard and insensible, the affecting illustrations of man's depravity, thus conveyed, would not fail invariably to awaken the liveliest

regret, and the most unfeigned penitence. Multifarious as are the conditions and circumstances of humanity, there are scarcely any which are not identified by the sacred writers; but none more frequently than the state of man, considered as a moral agent, and the change effected by the influence of the Holy Spirit upon his mind. This is the subject of the text conveyed to us in agricultural terms:—the church is God's husbandry: and in reference to this design, we are called upon,

I. To BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND. The heart of man is represented,

1. *As ground;* to show that it is expected to produce fruit that will benefit its owner. The purchase of ground naturally conveys this idea; and God expects from the human heart productions that will redound to his glory, and to the benefit of mankind, Luke xiii, 6; Isa. v, 1, 2.

2. *As fallow ground;* to show that it is destitute of the fruit that it might produce, it is uncultivated, it is unenclosed, it is a thoroughfare for the devil and all evil dispositions; the sun shines upon it without ripening any fruits of piety, and the rains descend without generating fertility: and not only is it useless to its owner, but prejudicial to neighbouring land that has good seed sown in it, in preventing the plants of righteousness from growing to perfection; for as the enemy scatters tares over the fallow ground, would it not be surprising, if none of them were to fall on the neighbouring cultivated land? 1 Cor. xv, 33.

3. *As our fallow ground;* because we have all ground committed to our cultivating care; and if it be not fallow now, there was a time when the term might have been applied to it with correctness and propriety. This ground is not our own absolutely, for Christ hath purchased it with his blood, 1 Cor. vi, 19, 20; and the day is coming when the *Landlord* will say, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou shalt be no longer steward," Luke xvi, 2. Hence we are admonished, "Break up your fallow ground;" this implies a work—1. *Of labour;* for which the Master of the land imparts strength. The ground is so hardened by those who have long passed over it, that it will be a work of difficulty. But be not discouraged. The plough of divine conviction has long lain disregarded on the surface of the ground; lay hold of it, and allow it to sink deep into your hearts, and there shall a salutary effect arise even from the pain which you thus experience. 2. *Of sacrifice;* for which the Proprietor of your hearts communicates fortitude. Remember, while you are engaged in this exercise,

that you must not allow any root of bitterness to remain in the ground, or your work is incomplete; you have loved some of the unholy plants, have admired their luxuriance; beware that you do not permit *them* to remain. The tears which you shed will soften the ground, and assist you to pluck them up. The harrow of holy penitence must pass over your hearts. 3. *Of constancy and perseverance;* for which the Lord of the soil supplies patience. The weeds that at present occupy the fallow land are of such a prolific nature, that you must constantly be employed in destroying them; if you rest, they will extend their roots, and give you more trouble than if you had never engaged in the work. Patience will be communicated to you, and by a fixed determination, you shall succeed in breaking up the fallow ground, and removing the thorns, and other pernicious plants which at present occupy it. 4. *Of renovation;* for which the owner of the ground affords means. The soil in its present state is unfit to produce any useful plants; but when the weeds which now grow therein are destroyed, the ground shall be renewed, that it may bring forth the fruits of piety.

II. Sow TO YOURSELVES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. We have here a representation of right principles, under the figure of seed; the propriety of which may be discerned, if we notice,

1. *Right principles are not indigenous to the human heart;* they must be sown there: even so it would be preposterous for a man to expect a fruitful crop, had he not first sown his seed.

2. *The value of right principles.* Observe, 1st. Their Author and Giver—God. 2d. Their price—the blood of the covenant. 3d. Their result—plants of righteousness.

3. *The care and attention they demand.* Remark the solicitude of the husbandman, in reference to his seed: so these principles require attention; if we do not care for them, they will languish and die, and the last state of the ground, where this takes place, will be worse than the first, 2 Pet. ii, 21, 22.

4. *The vegetative power and productive quality.* Right conduct is the offspring of these principles: the sun of divine grace augments their strength, and the dews of divine goodness increase their fertility; the plants of righteousness may at first be small, but in proportion as they are cherished they grow up, and what was formerly a wilderness becomes as the garden of God; others shall behold, and, excited by its beauty, shall "glorify our Father who is in heaven." Should we not then be anxious to obey the admonition, "Sow to yourselves," &c: that is, 1. *Allow these principles to sink deep into the heart;* let all obstructions

be removed out of the way. 2. *Let every plant that grows in our hearts be the result of this precious seed:* remember there are always those who will be ready to sow other seeds, and implant other principles; let these be rooted up with promptitude and fidelity. 3. *Though our anxiety should be principally on our own account,* "Sow to yourselves in righteousness," *yet our conduct should be a union of piety and benevolence.* Let not our neighbours have to say, that 'No man cared whether their ground was cultivated or fallow.'

III. REAP IN MERCY. Here we have an intimation, that if we plough and sow as already directed, the result shall be a harvest of mercy; we shall reap,

1. *In pardoning mercy;* mercy that cancels our sins, Isa. i, 18, and renders our performances acceptable to God.

2. *In restraining mercy;* that prevents us from running into error, Psa. xix, 13.

3. *In preserving mercy.* Unless the Lord were to protect us, we must inevitably fall. But let us remember, that God will preserve the faithful, Ps. xxxii, 10; Dt. xxxiii, 25; Job xvii, 9.

4. *In rewarding mercy.* God rewards us even in this world, 1 Tim. iv, 8; Psa. xxxvii, 25; but the mercy of God is like himself, infinite: it shall follow us, not only through the valley and shadow of death, Psa. xxiii, 4; but if we have sown in righteousness, we shall be received, beyond the grave, by our God and Father, into regions of eternal glory and blessedness, Isa. xxxv, 10. We did not deserve this, we cannot deserve it, and we may account it great mercy that when we plowed the wind, we did not reap the whirlwind, Hos. viii, 7. This is represented as harvest, because, 1. *The time of plowing and sowing is for ever over:* no room is left for penitence or beneficence, Eccl. ix, 10. 2. *Because at that period, all the produce of the soil will be presented to the Lord of the harvest.* "The chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels;" and by these celestial ministers, shall we ourselves, with our sheaves, be borne to the throne of the Eternal; transported by the mercy of our heavenly Father, the language of our lips and our heart will be, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be all the glory." 3. *Because reaping time is a season of joy and festivity.* But oh, what is the gladness that now accompanies the golden produce of harvest, compared with the seraphic anthems that shall then echo through the eternal vault of heaven, the ravishing melody that shall then float on the ethereal air, that shall burst on our raptured souls; the silent awe of heaven shall be superseded by

the song, "To him that hath loved us," &c, Rev. i, 5, 6; and eternity shall declare the advantages of sowing in righteousness.

OBSERVE,

1. This is the time to break up the fallow ground, Hos. x, 12. Now you have an opportunity; you may never have another. 2 Cor. vi, 2.

2. How great is the mercy of our God, that he will assist our endeavours to sow in righteousness, 1 Cor. iii, 6.

3. How audacious is the conduct of those that despise the offers of mercy, thus held out in the gospel. May God never have to say of us, "I have called, ye have refused," &c, Prov. i, 24—26, 29.

BETA.

XXVII.—*The Revival of God's Work earnestly implored.*

HABAKKUK iii, 2.

"O Lord, revive thy work."

IT is generally supposed, and seems highly probable, that this prophet was employed as a teacher of righteousness in the days of wicked Manasseh; when torrents of iniquity every where deluged the land; when treachery ravaged under the mask of friendship; and when the righteous were persecuted with relentless cruelty. But amidst this abounding depravity, it is evident that Habakkuk both *lived* and *preached* as a faithful prophet of the Lord should; and thus approving himself the friend of God, he was indulged accordingly; for the secret of the Lord was with him. It was revealed to him that God intended to correct the Jewish people, by sending them captive into Chaldea; that they would remain in a state of captivity for a certain number of years; and that at the end of those years, the Chaldeans themselves would be punished for their cruelties, and the captive Jews delivered. From these intimations of God's future purposes, our prophet could not but feel much for his afflicted country; but his chief concern was, that the interests of piety might not suffer amidst those national calamities. This therefore impels him to address God in the language of our text, "Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years," &c. By this example we are taught, that the prosperity of God's work should engage

the principal concern of his people. Being thus instructed, let us consider,

I. SOME PARTICULARS RESPECTING THIS WORK. As,

1. *The work itself;* or what is meant by the work here spoken of. It is certainly the work of divine grace in the souls of mankind. This is evident from St. Paul's application of Habakkuk's prophecy to impenitent sinners; compare Hab. i, 5, with Acts xiii, 40, 41. The work of God, employed in the salvation of men, must imply,—A work of *almighty power;* creating them anew, Eph. ii, 10;—a work of *infinite mercy;* forgiving all their sins, Acts xiii, 38, 39;—a work of *guardian care;* preserving them from all evil, Isa. xxvii, 3; Psa. cxxi, 4, 7;—a work of *edification;* perfecting them in holiness, 1 Pet. v, 10. Having observed the work itself, let us consider,

2. *Why it may be called God's work.* It may be thus denominated,—Because *no one but God can effect it.* He alone can know all our exigencies. He alone has authority to forgive us; "Who can forgive sins, but God only?" Mark ii, 7. And he alone has power to redeem us from sin, Satan, the world, and death, Psa. lxii, 1, 2.—Because *God is glorified by means of it.* Isa. lxi, 1—3; 1 Pet. ii, 9.— And because *this is the great end of all God's other works.* All the works of *nature* and *providence* are executed in subserviency to the salvation of immortal souls from death. For this glorious end,

> 'The Almighty, rising, his long sabbath broke:
> The world was made; was ruin'd; was restored;
> Laws from the skies were publish'd; were repeal'd;
> On earth, kings, kingdoms, rose; kings, kingdoms, fell;
> Famed sages lighted up the Pagan world;
> Prophets from Sion darted a keen glance
> Through distant age; saints travell'd; martyrs bled:
> By wonders sacred nature stood controll'd;
> The living were translated; dead were raised;
> Angels, and more than angels, came from heaven.'

The work itself being so important, let us consider,

3. *When God may be said to revive it.* The word here rendered revive, signifies not only to *restore* extinguished life, but also to *preserve*, or keep alive, and *improve.* Hence God revives his work—When souls are *raised* from the death of sin to a life of righteousness, Eph. ii, 1; Luke xv, 24; Rom. vi, 13.—When souls thus raised are *preserved* in spiritual life, Psa. cxxxviii, 7, and lxvi, 8, 9.—And when they *grow* in grace, in knowledge and strength, purity and comfort, Hos. xiv, 7; 2 Thess. i, 3. Surely

this revival of God's work is highly desirable, on every good principle; let us therefore observe,

II. How we may and should contribute towards its revival.

1. *We should labour for it.* Labour, or diligently endeavour —*To render yourselves capable of being useful.* By importunately seeking that this work may be most satisfactorily wrought in your own souls, Psa. li, 12, 13; by laying up abundant stores of Scriptural knowledge, Col. iii, 16; 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17; Psa. xxxvii, 30, 31; and by cultivating the love of Christ, as your impelling principle, 2 Cor. v, 14. And while you are thus labouring to acquire good, labour also to *communicate good*, 1 Pet. iv, 10. Do this,—By *the conscientious practice of family religion*, Josh. xxiv, 15;—by *promoting public worship among yourselves*, Acts x, 24, 33; Heb. x, 24, 25;—by *training up the rising generation for God*, Prov. xxii, 6; Eph. vi, 4;—by *sending God's word among the ignorant and perishing heathen;* both his *written* word, by furnishing them with Bibles, and his *preached* word, by supplying them with missionaries, Psa. cvii, 20, 21;—and by *personal communication of gospel truth*, Eph. iv, 29.

2. *We should live for it.* The salvation of the world greatly depends on the examples set by Christ's followers, Matt. v, 16; 1 Pet. ii, 12; Phil. ii, 14—16. This consideration should excite great carefulness in us that our deportment may prove only beneficial to others, Heb. xii, 13. Hence—Live *righteously:* be strictly just, and true, and good, Eph. v, 8, 9.—Live *soberly:* exemplifying uniform temperance and purity, Phil. iv, 8.—In a word, live *inoffensively:* imitate St. Paul, Acts xxiv, 16. On our labouring and living to promote the revival of God's work, observe,

3. *We should pray for it.* Pray for it—*with all prayer*, Eph. vi, 18. Let God's work be remembered by you in your secret retirements; at your family altar; and in your public assemblies, when you gather together in Christ's name, Matt. xviii, 20, 21.—And *with fervent importunity.* In this imitate Moses, Psa. xc, 16, 17; and David, Psa. lxxii, 18, 19, and cxviii, 25, and Isa. lxii, 1, 6, 7. Observe,

III. Why we should thus interest ourselves in its revival.

1. *We are excited to this by piety.* By pious *obedience* to God's *commands*, Gal. vi, 10; Luke xi, 2.—By pious *gratitude* for God's *mercies*, Psa. xxxiv, 4, 8.—By pious *imitation* of *Christ's example*, 2 Cor. viii, 9; Phil. ii, 5.

2. *We are urged to this by philanthropy, or love to mankind;* —for hereby you promote the *felicity of individuals*, Psa. lxxxix, 15, 16;—you promote the *peace of families*, Acts xvi, 34; Psa. cxviii, 15;—you promote the *welfare of your country*, Prov. xiv, 34;—and you promote the *good of posterity*, Deut. v, 29.

3. *We are obligated to this by prudence.* In consideration that *Satan and his emissaries are combined against us, in various ways*, of persecution, allurement, and falsehood, Psa. ii, 2; and that *zealous unanimity is requisite, and will succeed in counteracting their designs*, Phil. i, 27; 2 Cor. xiii, 11.

4. *We are animated to this by a well-supported hope.* Hope of probable *success*, Eccl. xi, 6. Hope of *God's certain approbation*, Isa. xlix, 4, 5; 2 Cor. viii, 12. Hope of *prosperity in our own souls*, Psa. cxxii, 6. And hope of *distinguished glory* in the eternal world, 1 Cor. xv, 58; Dan. xii, 3.

APPLICATION.

1. *The state of God's work among us should excite correspondent affections in us.—Lament that you see it revive no more;* that so many remain in spiritual death, Psa. cxix, 158, and that so many decline in spiritual life, Jer. ix, 1. *Be thankful for the good you witness:* for all who are raised by divine grace, preserved by it, and are growing in it, Acts xi, 23; 2 Thess. i, 3.

2. *We should consider and deplore our deficiencies.*—Our *deficiencies;* in acquiring and doing good. James iv, 17.—*Deplore them*, as implying ingratitude towards God, cruelty towards our neighbours, and folly with respect to ourselves, Psa. xxxviii, 18.

3. *We should improve our convictions by renewed application to God:* for pardoning *mercy*, and gracious *help*, Heb. iv, 16. —*Application to God's works;* as his *stewards:* by *immediate* exertion in his cause, Matt, xxi, 28; by *faithful* improvement of talents, 1 Cor. iv, 2; and by *vigorously* executing the great business of life, Eccl. ix, 10; 1 Chron. xxii, 16.

ALPHA.

XXVIII.—*Messiah's Government.*

MATTHEW ii, 6.

"And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

FROM the prophet Isaiah, chap. xlv, 18, we learn, that the intention of the Almighty in the creation of the world, was to accommodate and bless his sensitive creatures; among whom, in this part of his dominion, man has the pre-eminence. But the general tenor of Scripture assures us, that man's spiritual and immortal part is that which especially engages his Maker's care. Accordingly, in reference to his fallen and ruined condition, the all-important work of redemption is no less the subject of the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, than of the history and doctrines of the New. The light of prophecy, while it serves to show the greatness and steadiness of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour," serves also by the concentration of its rays in the person of Jesus, to identify him as the promised Messiah: and the same minuteness of description which marked the latter acts and circumstances of his mediatorial work on earth, points out the gracious visitant, on his manifestation in the flesh. Does prophecy foreshow the treachery of Judas? Psa. xli, 9, with John xiii, 18;—the combination of our Lord's enemies? Psa. ii, with Acts iv, 23, 27;—the dispersion of his disciples? Zech. xiii, 7, with Mark xiv, 50;—the distribution of his raiment? Psa. xxii, 18, with Matt. xxvii, 35;—the manner of his death, his burial, resurrection, &c? See Isa. liii, 4—9; Mark xv, 27, 28; John xix, 36, 37; Acts ii, 25—36, and xiii, 32—37, &c. The same divine word foretells the time of his birth, Gen. xlix, 10;—the manner of his birth, Isa. vii, 14, with Matt. i, 23;—and the place of his birth. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" &c. "When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and demanded of the chief priests and scribes of the people where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, Mic. v, 2. And thou

Bethlehem, in the land of Juda," &c, ver. 1—6. The governor of whom the prophet writes, appears to be a person of great importance; and as the office of governor necessarily supposes subjects and government, if we feel ourselves interested in his administration, it may be also of consequence to us to be informed, as concerning his character, so also concerning that of his subjects and government, We therefore contemplate,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE GOVERNOR;—in which we may notice more particularly his dignity—his condescension—his fidelity—his clemency.

1. *His dignity.* Persons selected for the government of provinces, are usually persons of consideration, on account of *rank* as well as on account of the requisite *talents*. Of this Governor it may be said, that he is even above all rank, being above comparison, inasmuch as he is "over all, God blessed for ever," Rom. ix, 5, and possessing both the nature and the titles of the Supreme Being. An apostle tells us, that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily," Col. ii, 9, and agreeably to this he has the title of *Jehovah*, Jer. xxxiii, 16; Isa. xlv, 18, 26, with Rom. xiv, 11, 12. He is also called *God*, John i, 1; Heb. i, 8; the *true God*, 1 John v, 20; the *great God*, Titus ii, 13; the *mighty God*, Isa. xi, 6; the *First* and the *Last*, Rev. i, 17. And we may accordingly observe, that the dignity of this Governor ("that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts,") is suitably sustained by his attributes or qualifications. Instance, his *power;* as evinced in creation, John i, 3;—in the conservation of all things, Heb. i, 3;—in raising the dead, John v, 21-23.—His *wisdom;* penetrating the thoughts of men, Matt. xi, 4; John ii, 24, 25;—and the intentions of the devil, Luke xxii, 31; see also Col. ii, 3; Rev. ii, 23.—His *rectitude*, Heb. i, 8, 9.—His *goodness;* designing and doing every thing for the welfare of his subjects; full proof of which we have in,

2. *His condescension;* which is sufficiently evidenced by his stooping to interest himself, as Mediator, in our affairs at all. "He who was rich, for our sakes became poor." But more especially in that, when he visited this revolted province, he submitted to share with us the lowest part of our condition, the penal effects of our base revolt, suffering and death. To this purpose the apostle's address to the Philippians; "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," &c, chap. ii, 5—8.

3. *His fidelity—to Him by whom he was appointed:* in asserting his rightful authority, Matt. xxii, 37, 38;—in requiring submission to his holy laws, Matt. v, 17—19; and in personal

obedience: hear his remarks to his parents, Luke ii, 49; to the Baptist, Matt. iii, 15; and to his own disciples, John iv, 31, 34. *His fidelity to them for whom he was appointed:* in affording them all necessary and useful information, John xvi, 12, 13, 33; —in appointing them all needful officers and ordinances, Eph. iv, 7—13; and in bearing the full weight of their most afflictive concerns, Luke xii, 50; Heb. ii, 14—18. To which we may add the interest that he always employs in the court of heaven on their behalf, Heb. vii, 25. Consistent with which is,

4. *His clemency:* ever ready to pardon any who return from that rebellion into which they have been unhappily betrayed; "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Nay, he is ready to pardon them, even if they have *relapsed* into rebellion. Backsliders, think of Peter; be encouraged, and return, and find acceptance! We proceed to consider,

II. THE CHARACTER OF HIS SUBJECTS. "He shall rule *my people Israel.*" The name of Israel was given to Jacob, on occasion of his wrestling with the angel of the covenant, Gen. xxxii, 24—28. Afraid of his brother Esau, Jacob wept and made supplication unto him, and prevailed, Hos. xii, 4. The name thus obtained descended to his posterity, most of whom, however, were unworthy of it; inasmuch as they walked not in the footsteps of the patriarch, but were strangers to that *self-despair*, and *earnestness*, and *faith*, evinced by him, when the angel said, "Thy name shall be called Israel." Agreeably to this the apostle tells us, "that they are not all Israel which are of Israel," Rom. xi, 6, 7. While, on the other hand, we are assured that, "God hath visited the Gentiles, to take *out of them* a people for his name," Acts xiii, 14. Hence Paul applies the term, "my people," not to the Jews only, but to the Gentiles also; quoting, in reference to both, the prophet's language, "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved," Rom. ix, 26. And in his epistle to the Philippians, chap. iii, 3, he expressly determines the character of the true "Israel," by saying, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Such persons resemble Jacob, in *his self-despair*—they have "no confidence in the flesh," either as respects their own righteousness, or the efficacy of Jewish ordinances; see ver. 4—6, and Rom. x, 1—4: —they imitate *his faith;* his trust in the Angel of the covenant, that he would *bless* him; they "rejoice in Christ Jesus"—in his teaching, atonement, protection; inasmuch as their Governor

unites in himself the prophetic, priestly, and kingly characters. And as Jacob "wept and made supplication," they imitate his *earnestness;* while they "worship God *in the spirit.*" Forms of worship are useful, and indeed necessary; forms are the guardians of realities; yet the true Israelites are not content with set forms and set times of worship, unless they feel their spirits aspiring heavenward. And the law of God being written on "the fleshly tables of their hearts," they cheerfully and habitually run the way of his commandments. Is this our character? Are we thus his people whom Jesus rules? If so, we are particularly concerned to contemplate,

III. THE CHARACTER OF HIS GOVERNMENT;—concerning which we may observe, that it is,

1. *Divine and spiritual.* Of good governments in general it may be said, that they are of *divine* original. "For there is no power but of God," &c, Rom. xiii, 1. But this is specially appointed, Psa. ii, 6, to exercise spiritual authority; and so to overrule temporal matters, as to subserve the spiritual interests of the church;—to oppose and overthrow the dominion of *infernal spirits*, Luke x, 18; Col. i, 13;—to engage the services, to employ the talents of *celestial spirits*, Heb. i, 14;—and to operate on *embodied human spirits*, renewing their understandings, affections, &c, Eph. i, 18; Col. ii, 2, 3. Whence it follows that it is,

2. *Mild and equitable:—mild;* the Governor, who is "the Prince of peace," rules without coercion; his people are a willing people, Psa. cxix, 32:—*equitable;* in that no man receives more of correction or less of encouragement and recompense than he entitles himself to by his choice and his conduct, John v, 43; Rom. ii, 6, 7, 10.

3. *Vigorous and effective:*—employing a most vigilant and extensive inspection and superintendency, 2 Chron. xvi, 9; Psa. xi, 4—7; and all the energetic agency of the heavenly host: the angels of the Lord, who excel in strength, being all of them "ministering spirits," Psa. ciii, 19—21. "He hath on his vesture and on his thigh, a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." So that his government is effective, for the putting down of all opposition, Psa. xxiv, 7—10; Col. ii, 15; Heb. ii, 14;—and for the safety and happiness of all its subjects, Rom. viii, 34—39. For this is,

4. *A stable, prosperous, everlasting government.* "The gates"—the policy, and malice, and power—"of hell shall not prevail against it." "It cannot be moved," Heb. xii, 28. Of

its *increase* and peace there shall be no end, Isa. xi, 7. "And the kingdom and dominion, under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom," &c, Dan. vii, 27; Heb. i, 8.

APPLICATION.

1. Let the enemies and opposers of this government tremble. 1 Cor. xv, 25; Psa. ii, 9; Rom. ii, 4, 8, 9.

2. Let rebels and deserters submit and find peace, Psalm ii, 10—12.

3. Let the subjects and friends of this government rejoice in anticipation of its progressive and rapid conquests, and its final triumph, Psa. ii, 7, 8; Rev. vii, 9—12.

ZETA.

XXIX.—*The Duty and Advantage of Prayer.*

MATTHEW vii, 7, 8.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

PRAYER is a duty of vital importance, having associated with it blessings and privileges of the highest value, and without which human life would be truly wretched. To have afforded to us the best direction as to the right performance of this duty, and to be encouraged with the sure hope of success in it, cannot but greatly interest every sincere inquirer after divine things. In our text, we have, 1. A duty enjoined; and, 2. A promise annexed to the right discharge of it.

I. A DUTY ENJOINED;—*Prayer.* This duty is expressed in three words—*ask*, *seek*, *knock*. This multiplication of words to the same purpose, is not needless or superfluous; for it imports,

1. That we are naturally reluctant to enter on the duty of prayer; and therefore our blessed Saviour, to engage our attention to it, and interest our hearts in it, here commands it thrice in one breath—*ask*, *seek*, *knock*. This duty cannot be too impressively urged on our notice, considering the necessity of it, and the superior advantages connected with it.

2. That God, in this duty of prayer, requires faith, diligence,

importunity, and constancy. And therefore, when our Saviour bids us *ask*, which is the precept for prayer, he also enjoins us to *seek* and *knock*, to show how our asking or prayers must be qualified; namely, that we must be not only sincere, but also earnest and constant in them.

3. The word *ask* is expressive of good things desired. Our Saviour does not here inform us whom we should ask, nor what we should ask, but only says *ask*. The reason of this silence here is, because in this sermon on the mount, he had already given his auditory directions both as to the object and the matter of prayer;—he had told them to whom they should pray, and for what they should pray.

4. Our Saviour expresses prayer by this word *ask*, to show us, 1. That we are poor, indigent, necessitous creatures, full of wants. 2. That our supplies must come from God, who alone is sufficient and willing to supply the whole of them. 3. That if we would have God to supply them, we must ask this of him, according to the precept in this case recorded in his word. And, 4. On what easy terms we may have our wants supplied, and our necessities relieved, namely, by *asking*.

5. The word *seek* is used chiefly in reference to things that are lost, or at least not possessed and enjoyed. So that *seeking* has relation to the means which God has appointed for attaining the things we need. Prayer, or asking, without diligence in seeking, would evince a disposition unfriendly to the rich provisions of the gospel. God, who has said, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask," James i, 5, let him pray for it, has also commanded us to seek wisdom, and to search for understanding, as for hidden treasure, Prov. ii, 3, 4.

6. The word *knock* has relation to those hindrances or impediments which are as so many doors shut against us, till such time as God open them; in regard of which, the duty here required of us is to *knock*. There are many who ask, and some to asking will join seeking; but when they meet with obstacles in the duty of prayer, which sense and carnal reason falsely judge to be invincible, then their hearts sink, their resolution fails, their hands fall down, and they refuse to knock. But they who would pray acceptably and successfully, must *ask;* to that they must add *seeking;* and to both they must join *knocking*, when the answer of prayer is delayed, or the mercies prayed for not granted.

II. THE PROMISE ANNEXED TO THE RIGHT DISCHARGE OF THE DUTY. This promise is given in three distinct terms, an-

swerable to the words enjoining prayer—*it shall be given you*, or *ye shall receive—ye shall find—it shall be opened unto you.*

1. We may *ask*, and not *receive; seek*, and not *find; knock*, and not have the door *opened* to us at the time we expect. But the delay of the answer of prayer is no denial, but is sometimes a mercy. God never defers when it is seasonable to grant an answer. Yet if we address the throne of grace according to the plan here prescribed by our Saviour, we shall receive an answer, either in kind or value, at the most proper season; and then we shall rejoice, though under the delay we were subjected to a painful exercise of mind. Promises contain good things to come, and these, while they are in expectation, cause a restless anxiety; but when accomplished, then the present fruition brings gladness and joy. Solomon says, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life," Prov. xiii, 12.

2. We have here the promise of God's word for our encouragement, that he who asks shall receive. Let this excite us to earnestness in prayer, and to constancy therein; for his promise is a sufficient security for the hope of success. He puts a higher value on his promise, than we do on our lives. His promise is of far greater importance to him, than either heaven or earth; and will suffer those to perish, rather than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail, Matt. v, 18.

3. Some may possibly say, Does not the apostle James mention some who ask, and receive not? James iv, 3. Did not the mother of Zebedee's children seek a favour of Christ for her two sons, and yet found it not? Matt. xx, 21. Did not the virgins knock, but never had the door opened unto them? Matt. xxv, 11. And does not experience teach us, that we may desire many things at the hand of God, which we never obtain? How then is the promise true? I answer, that this promise in the text must be understood with some restrictions and limitations, namely, that the prayers of those to whom this promise is made, must be right as to *manner*, *matter*, and *season* of them.

4. They must be right as to the *manner* of performing them. They must be offered up in the *name* of Christ, as *Mediator*, in whom all the promises are yea and amen, 2 Cor. i, 20. And by *faith* in Christ, and in the veracity and faithfulness of God, Mark xi, 24.—They must be right as to the *matter* of them. We must ask for those things only which God authorizes us to ask and seek, which he has promised, and which we need. They must be performed in due *season*, wherein the promised blessings are

to be obtained, Isa. lv, 6. Some will cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," when the door is finally shut, Matt. xxv, 11.

5. Now the cases already mentioned failed, in one or other of these qualifications; and therefore it is not remarkable that they met with repulses. Nay, so far is God from suffering his promise to fail, that he frequently gives even more than is asked. He is more willing to give than we are to receive; and herein is he glorified, that we bear much fruit, John xv, 8.

Let us then comply with the whole of this precept for prayer, that we may receive present salvation, and a title to eternal life.

THETA.

XXX.—*The Gospel Call.*

MATTHEW xxi, 28—33.

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," &c.

IN these verses our Saviour shows by the parable of two sons, that penitent publicans and harlots were in a far more eligible state or condition for receiving the gospel, than self-righteous persons. For understanding this parable, it is necessary to consider generally and briefly, that our Saviour, by the first of these sons, represents publicans, harlots, tax-gatherers, and sinners of all descriptions, who convinced of their awful state and danger, by the preaching of the word, proved far better than at first they promised, turning away from all their iniquities, and readily and heartily embracing the gospel; and by the second son, he represents the learned scribes and the self-righteous pharisees, who promised fair, and performed nothing. This parable was designed for the reproof and correction of the scribes and pharisees: and therefore our Saviour appeals to themselves, that out of their own mouth he might judge and condemn them.

I. AN INJUNCTION;—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." This *certain man*, who had two sons, is intended to represent God. He came to the first, and said, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." Here we have the Father's command. *Go work*—thou must not be idle. Go work in *my vineyard*, thou must be employed where I appoint thee. Go work *to-day*, thou must do it immediately. This command of God concerns all of us:

we are enjoined to go and work to-day in his vineyard,—to make religion our present business. Here we may observe,

1. *That true religion is a work;* and though hard and difficult, yet pleasant and profitable. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life," Matt. vii, 14. Yet the "ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. iii, 17. God's "commandments are not grievous," 1 John v, 3; and "in keeping of them there is great reward," Psa. xix, 11.

2. *That the gospel or ministerial call to this work requires and demands present obedience.* "Go work *to-day.*" To-morrow may be too late. "To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts," Heb. iii, 15. We are called to "work while it is day;" for "the night cometh when no man can work," John ix, 4. The brevity of human life, and the important work of our salvation to be accomplished while it lasts, are considerations which should occupy the attention, and deeply impress the heart of every one.

3. *That this call is full both of authority and affection;* because it is the command of a *Father*, and it is directed to us as *children.* "Go, son, work to-day in my vineyard." He calls him *son*, to remind him of his own authority, to oblige and dispose of him as he pleases, to excite him to reverence, confidence, affection, and obedience; and to assure him, on his compliance, subjection, and faithfulness, of all paternal regards, and an ample remuneration. What encouragement is here given to sinners, to devote themselves to God and his service!

II. THE ANSWER OF THE SON;—"He said, I will not: but afterwards he repented and went."

1. *This answer of the son is a very unfeeling and impertinent one.* He might have been more respectful; and if he had not a mind to go, might have excused himself in more modest language, and not given a direct refusal, saying, *I will not.* This is the voice of corrupt nature, the language of folly and madness; and shows us the entertainment which the gospel injunctions meet with from the majority of those persons who are thus addressed. We see here a picture of the state of fallen man, the prevalence of the carnal mind, and how unwelcome the salvation of Christ is to practical sinners. They even treat him with most censurable neglect, and insolent contempt.

2. *But afterwards he repented, and went.* Some persons will not go from their word, lest they should be deemed inconsistent. Afterwards the son repented;—better late wise, than never wise.

He changed his mind, from a conviction that he had done wrong; the immediate effect is obedience, he *went* into his father's vineyard. The gospel call meets with peremptory refusals from multitudes of those who hear it; they refuse "him that speaketh from heaven," Heb. xii, 25; which conduct exposes them to the greatest peril,—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Heb. ii, 3. Obedience is the sure way of escaping danger, and the only evidence of a change of heart. Well it is when profligate sinners amend their ways, and turn to God. *He repented;* and, as a proof of it, *went* into the vineyard.

3. *Though this change of mind in him involves in it a contradiction, yet his conduct in this instance can be justified on the soundest principles both of reason and revelation.* On what grounds can a life of sin and disobedience be vindicated? Not on any correct view of man's responsibility while in this world; nor on the doctrine of a suitable retribution beyond the grave. Sin brings disgrace on the character of man, and renders him the subject of guilt and misery.

III. THE FATHER CAME TO THE SECOND SON, AND SAID, "Go, work to-day in my vineyard."

1. *This son had the same kind of call given him that the other had.* The same call, as to the sense of it, is given to all who are favoured with the gospel; but it is very different in its effects, for to some it is "the savour of death unto death," while to others it is "the savour of life unto life," 2 Cor. ii, 15, 16. He answered, "*I go, sir; and went not.*" This answer is very different from that of his brother. He called his father "sir," expressive of respect and complaisance, and promised ready obedience. He did not say, I will go, but "I go," promptly, immediately, now. But he *went not;* he spake well, but did nothing: saying and doing are two things. His answer should be ours; we should say from the heart *We go:* but then we should take care that we act according to our profession of obedience.

2. *The command of our heavenly Father should be received with great reverence;* and men should express their gratitude for such a gracious call, by a ready compliance. But, alas! many who make a pompous profession of obedience are the most reluctant to fulfil their engagements. How many are there in the Christian world, who profess that they know God according to the holy Scriptures, but daily deny him in their spirit and temper, as well as their words and works. What a

deception! Their foundation is sand, which will give way, and the whole imaginary structure fall down. And what will they do, when God calls them to judgment?

Hence we learn, that the religion of many persons consists only in good purposes and resolutions; but this will not avail, for they only are blessed who "do his commandments," as an evidence of possessing saving grace. Let us therefore secure the inward principle of saving grace, that we may be assisted to glorify God in all our works.

THETA.

XXXI.—*Children of Light affectionately admonished.*

LUKE xvi, 8.

"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

THE parable before us gives an account of a steward, who, about to be dismissed from his master's service for unfaithfulness, ver. 2, 3, and hearing his doom pronounced, began to consider how he should be supported when discarded by his lord: at length he determined on the expedient named in ver. 4—7; and the lord commended the foresight, care, and contrivance of his servant, in having acted so prudently for himself, though dishonestly towards his master. The improvement this part of the parable suggests is, that as this worldly-wise man was so provident for his future security and subsistence, we should avail ourselves of the hints suggested by his foresight, and, hating the injustice of his conduct, should show a laudable concern for the more important affairs of religion. Let us therefore, in considering our Saviour's application of the former part of this parable, notice,

I. THE CHARACTERS PRESENTED TO OUR VIEW IN THIS TEXT.

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS THE FORMER ARE IN THEIR GENERATION WISER THAN THE LATTER.

I. THE CHARACTERS PRESENTED TO OUR VIEW IN THE TEXT. By the children of this world we are to understand,

1. *Those who are governed by a worldly spirit;*—whose views are so limited, that they seek no higher good than earthly sources yield. The fleeting vanities of sense are all they admire. For them religion has no charms—no attractions;—their thoughts.

desires, and affections, are absorbed in the world. Our Lord has portrayed their character, Luke xii, 16—21.

2. *Who are alive to all the enjoyments of the world.* The inquiry is, "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Matt. vi, 31. The eye seeks objects to feast a disordered imagination, and the ear listens to those communications which gratify a depraved nature, while the various sources of pleasure are eagerly pursued, 2 Pet. ii, 13; 2 Tim. iii, 4.

3. *Whose time and attention are wholly employed about worldly things.* Their business is to amass wealth, obtain honour, or enjoy pleasure;—the undivided stream of nature's tide flows on in this channel,—their inclinations, thoughts, and actions, are all directed to this end;—the world engrosses the whole soul.

By the children of light is meant those who are enlightened by the Holy Ghost, of whom the apostle speaks, Eph. v, 8, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," and imports,

1st. *A state of knowledge*, Isa. viii, 20. The word of God is their guide; through that medium, and the light of divine grace, they discover the sinfulness of sin—the wickedness of the heart—the vanity of the world—and the excellency of religion. By the same light they see the plan of salvation—the virtue of Christ's sacrifice—their title to heaven—and the boundless felicity awaiting them.

2nd. *A state of holiness*, 1 John i, 7. Hence they profess to regard earthly things, only as they may subserve the purposes of their salvation. Being risen with Christ, their affections are fixed on things above, Col. iii, 1, 2; while they acknowledge that here they have no continuing city, Heb. xiii, 14.

3rd. *A state of comfort*, Psa. xcvii, 11. They joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have received the atonement, Rom. v, 11. The children of light are those who believe in, love, and obey the Saviour.

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD ARE WISER IN THEIR GENERATION THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

1. *They are more resolved upon securing their object.* The avaricious man has the whole bent of his soul employed in the pursuit of gain: its acquisition is the spring of action; and to accomplish his end, he will sacrifice ease, honour, or pleasure. The end governs the means, and gives industry and activity in the use of them.—But alas! the children of light, with an object

infinitely nobler in view, are comparatively supine and undetermined:—there is too much debility and inconstancy in the pursuit of religion.

2. *They are more judicious in the choice of means best calculated to obtain the object.* What deliberation, sagacity, and ingenuity, are displayed by the men of the world in suiting the means to the end;—but in the concerns of the soul we are too much the creatures of habit and custom;—circumstances too frequently hinder us in the discharge of duty, whereas religion should be a first business, and the means to obtain it should govern our worldly affairs.

3. *They are more indefatigable in their exertions.* Their desires, words, and actions, all evince an eagerness which nothing can abate but the possession of that which is the object of their pursuit;—no time is lost, no opportunity unimproved, where there is the probability of success;—but in the pursuit of religion, what dulness of apprehension, what languor of affection, what want of energy, of holy, restless enterprise!

4. *They are more invincible in their efforts.* They are not intimidated by difficulties—allured by charms—discouraged by impediments in the way, or seduced by friendship. But how soon are the children of light discouraged!—the desertion of friends, the combination of foes, a frowning providence, or a strong temptation, frequently impedes their progress.

5. *They are more determined in their purposes.* The children of this world make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not serve one purpose it must another; but the children of light do not act so considerately: if their efforts in the world are unsuccessful, they are too prone to say, 'These things are against us;' instead of keeping their souls in patience and trusting in God, who causeth all things to work together for good to them that love him, Rom. viii, 28. By a faithful improvement of every providence, we shall lay up treasure in heaven.

From this subject let us learn,

1. *To form a proper estimate of the characters we have been describing.* The children of this world are not absolutely wiser than the children of light, but only in their generation—in the concerns of this life. Their situation is awful. Living without God, on the brink of eternity, and concerned only for this world.—Their wisdom is foolishness in the estimation of Him whose judgment is infallible, 1 Cor. iii, 19; Jer. xvii, 11.

2. *To silence the objections of the ungodly by acting consistently with our profession.* Is the soul of greater importance

than the body?—religion more valuable than the world?—then let us pursue our course with an ardour and a zeal becoming the object of our desires.

KAPPA.

XXXII.—*The Apostle's Prayer for an Increase of Faith.*

LUKE xvii, 5.

"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."

IN the verses preceding the text, our Divine Redeemer instructs his disciples in the nature and importance of a most difficult duty, that of forgiving injuries; a duty totally unknown or utterly disregarded, till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example; as the wisest moralists of the most enlightened nations represented the desire of revenge as the mark of a noble mind, and thought it more magnanimous to revenge an injury, than forgive it. "If thy brother trespass against thee," &c, ver. 3. "Offences will come:" our views are dissimilar, our passions discordant, and our interests diversified; some offend by their dispositions—others by their manners—others by their conduct; some by their ignorance, and others by their wickedness; but whatever motive may actuate the offending person, or however frequently he may repeat the offence, yet, if he repent, "thou shalt forgive him." The apostles seemed aware of the difficulty attendant on the practice of this duty, and therefore said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith." In the text there are four general ideas implied.

I. THAT THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST POSSESS FAITH. There can be no *increase* where there is no possession. We may infer the truth of the above assertion,

1. *From the nature of faith.* Definitions of faith are abundant; genuine faith implies the entertaining Scriptural views of the person and offices of Christ, accompanied by an implicit dependance on him for salvation, and a cordial reception of him in the heart. And if this view of faith be correct, it can exist only among the disciples of Christ. Infidels deny his existence—Arians and Socinians reject his atonement—Pharisees trust in themselves that they are righteous, and are ignorant of Christ's righteousness—and practical sinners of all kinds refuse to admit him into their hearts.

2. *From the character of Christ's disciples.* As disciples, they are all instructed by him. In what?—the doctrines of faith. What do they learn?—to believe in his name, to submit to his authority, and to depend upon his truth. As disciples they follow him; does not this suppose the exercise of faith? Acts xiii, 38. They rejoice in him, Luke xix, 37. But their joy is the joy of faith, 1 Pet. i, 8.

3. *From the testimonies of revelation.* Jesus said to one, "O woman, great is thy faith!" To another, "Thy faith hath saved thee." He prayed for Peter, that his "faith fail not." Stephen was "a man full of faith," &c.

II. THAT AN INCREASE OF FAITH IS POSSIBLE. This will appear,

1. *From the power and goodness of its Author.* Faith is not an earthborn virtue, begotten by the mere exercise of the human faculties, but a grace that owes its existence to the agency of Jesus Christ. He is "the author and finisher of our faith," &c, Heb. xii, 2; Eph. ii, 8; Phil. i, 29. And cannot he who bestows the gift, increase that gift? He who opens the eye of the mind to behold the glories of eternity, can shine with clearer light, and beam with greater lustre. His power is infinite, and his goodness unlimited.

2. *From the progressive nature of religion.* Religion is all progression, and every Christian grace admits of an increase; its first implantation in the heart resembles a seed, which when cast into the earth germinates, and, by progressive and gradual growth, becomes a great tree. Christians are regarded as walking, running, pressing forward, all of which expressions denote increase and advancement. Religion must not be considered in detached parts, but as a complete system of holy principles. and heavenly fruits, which have a necessary dependance upon each other; and our increase in one, necessarily ensures an increase in the whole.

3. *From the admonitions of the Bible.* Christians are exhorted to "grow in grace," &c, 2 Pet. iii, 18. Earnestly to contend for the faith, &c, Jude 3. To build yourselves up, &c, ver. 20. These, with many other texts in the New Testament, prove that an increase of faith is possible.

4. *From the experience of the saints.* Faith increases by exercise; every act of faith tends to give permanency and stability to the principle which gives it birth. Christians depend upon God for providential, spiritual, and eternal benefits; and that dependance increases in proportion as they know more of God, Psa. ix, 10.

III. THAT AN INCREASE OF FAITH IS GREATLY TO BE DESIRED. We infer this,

1. *From its nature.* It is a divine gift, and its existence is attributed to the operation of God, Col. ii, 12. That which God works in us must be desirable: as he is an infinitely good being, his works must necessarily bear a resemblance to himself.

2. *From its effects.* These refer—*To our own personal salvation.* We are justified by faith—saved by faith—Christ dwells in our hearts by faith—we stand by faith—live by faith—walk by faith—and have boldness of access to God by faith. *To the victories we gain over our enemies.* By the shield of faith we quench the fiery darts, &c, Ephes. vi, 16. We conquer the world by faith, 1 John v, 4. The ancient worthies by faith "subdued kingdoms," &c, Heb. xi, 33, 34.—*To the moral influence of our example.* True faith produceth good works; for "faith without works is dead;" and good works are profitable unto men, Matt. v, 16; Titus iii, 8. That on which such high encomiums are bestowed in the Bible, by which such amazing effects have been produced, and the absence of which involves men in condemnation here and eternal damnation hereafter, must be desirable. And as the most certain way of retaining faith, is by increasing in it, we may infer the truth of the above position.

IV. THAT MEANS SHOULD BE USED TO SECURE AN INCREASE OF FAITH. To accomplish this object,

1. *Study the character of its author.* Meditate on the power, wisdom, and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reflect on what he has done for mankind; contemplate what he has promised to do. Think meanly of the Saviour, and you will have little confidence in him; but think greatly and highly of him, and you will trust in him heartily, and believe in him fully.

2. *Get a more extensive acquaintance with the promises of God.* Read them frequently; treasure them up in your memories; hide them in your hearts; meditate on their greatness, variety, and immutability; and labour to realize them in your own personal experience.

3. *Be on your guard against every thing that will deaden or damp the ardour of your faith.* Carnal company, worldly cares, spiritual supineness, filthy and foolish conversation,—all tend to sap the foundation of your faith, and destroy your dependance upon God. Chiefly,

4. *Pray for an increase of faith.* "The apostles said unto

the Lord, increase our faith;"—"Go thou, and do likewise. Say it *humbly*, from a deep conviction of thy unworthiness, and the infinite dignity and goodness of thy Saviour;—say it *fervently;* pour out strong cries and fervent supplications in behalf of this blessing;—say it *importunately;* recollect the importunate widow, and the poor blind beggar;—say it in thy closet;—say it in the assemblies of the saints;—say it as thou walkest by the way;—say it for thy own sake, and for the sake of others.

In conclusion, we address a word,

1. *To those who have no faith.* Your case is awful, you are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you. You need say unto the Lord, Give us faith, impart the heavenly gift to us, and let us believe to the saving of our souls.

2. *To those whose faith has declined.* "Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do your first works."

3. *To those whose faith remains in full vigour.* "Hold fast whereto ye have already attained, and walk by the same rule," &c. Keep faith in lively exercise, and soon you will receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

BETA.

XXXIII.—*The Bread of Life.*

JOHN vi, 34.

"Lord, evermore give us this bread."

THERE is displayed in the gospel a most admirable and delightful combination of doctrines, precepts, and promises; and the performance of each Christian duty entitles us to the enjoyment of some gracious promise. This sentiment is exemplified in no employment more than that of prayer; an engagement in which all good men have delighted, and the pleasure of which increases in proportion to the frequency of its repetition and the fervour of its exercise. Thank God none need be at a loss for words in his addresses to the Divine Being: for, in addition to that comprehensive form of prayer, significantly designated "the Lord's Prayer," sentiments of petition, supplication, and intercession are interspersed through the inspired volume, many of which were used by holy men, who were disciples of our Lord, who heard the gracious words that dropped from his lips.

and who were favoured by his immediate instruction; one of these is recorded in the text. Our Lord had been pointing out the amazing superiority which he and his dispensation possessed over the dispensation of food which miraculously sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. The disciples heard with attention, and when he had ended his instructive observations, they unanimously cried out, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Observe in this prayer,

I. A BLESSING REQUESTED;—"This bread;" that is, the true bread from heaven, "for the bread of God is He that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world," ver. 33. Bread is here, by Jesus Christ, represented as a type of himself; and to show its propriety, remark,

1. *Bread is of a vivifying quality.* Metaphors, which are drawn from earthly objects to represent heavenly ones, must necessarily be defective in expressing their full meaning. Bread, though of a reviving nature, cannot restore animation, when life is extinct; but the bread of heaven finds us in a state of death, and its efficacy is manifested in communicating life to our souls, Eph. ii, 1, as well as in supporting that life in all circumstances, Psa. xxiii, 2, 5.

2. *Bread is congenial to all appetites.* All have *naturally* a disposition for bread; and in the same manner, Christ, the Bread from heaven, is exactly suited to satisfy the spiritual appetites of mankind; and as some tastes are vitiated to such a degree, that they do not relish bread, so many sinners prefer feeding on ashes and husks rather than on Christ, Luke xv, 16; Isa. lv, 2, xliv, 20.

3. *Bread is the common gift of God to the world.* Only a few possess the luxuries of life; but bread is for all, it is the greatest blessing that God ever bestowed for the support of animal life; and "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life," &c, John iii, 16, 17; and this is the greatest blessing the Almighty ever bestowed for the benefit of our souls, John xv, 5.

4. *Bread can only be useful as we partake of it.* It may be in our hands, but unless we feed upon it it will be of no benefit to us. We hear Christ preached, we attend on his ordinances; but in vain is all this, unless we stretch forth the hand, eat, and live for ever, John vi, 27; 1 Cor. xi, 24.

II. A PERSON ADDRESSED;—"Lord:" who is the proper object of prayer, because,

1. *Prayer is the language of need;* and of this humanity is full. No sun rises that does not cast his beams on our wants; and whither should we go, but to Him, in whom dwelleth all the fulness necessary to supply the wants of mankind, John vi, 68; Col. ii, 9.

2. *Prayer is the expression of a dependant to a superior.* And who gave us life? who has supported it to the present moment? That God on whom we and all other created beings depend, Gen. i, 26, 27; Acts xvii, 26, 28.

3. *Prayer is the result of hope;* and surely, if ever there was a foundation for hope, it is in God, Psa. xlii, 11. He has condescended to assume the most endearing and encouraging characters, in his relations to mankind, Psa. xlviii, 14; 2 Cor. vi, 18. He has deigned to promise the full supply of our wants, and abundance of both temporal and spiritual blessings, 1 Pet. i, 4; Psa. cxxx, 8, xxxvii, 25. He has been the God of our fathers, 2 Cor. i, 10. Hope in the Lord is therefore founded upon a sure and rational basis.

III. A MODE OF COMMUNICATION STATED;—"Give us this bread."

1. *Because we can no more maintain spiritual life without it, than our bodies can live without food.*

2. *Because we cannot borrow it with any possibility of returning it,* on account of our necessitous circumstances. Nor do we ever receive more of this bread than we can use, Rev. iii, 17.

3. *Because we cannot purchase it;* having been plundered by sin of every valuable we possessed, Acts viii, 20, 21.

4. *Because we cannot earn it;* we have been disabled, nor can we move till we receive this invaluable restorative; and if we receive it, it must be as a gift, Luke x, 30; Tit. iii, 5.

IV. A PERIOD FOR ITS CONTINUANCE SPECIFIED?—"evermore."

1. *Because in this world we shall always need it.* To whatever state of grace a man may attain, he is still liable to fall, as appears from a variety of petitions and cautions which the Scriptures contain, Psa. li, 12; Prov. i, 24—32; Matt. xxiv, 13; Luke ix, 62; 1 Tim. i, 19, 20; Heb. x, 38, 39. Let the Almighty withdraw his support for one moment, and we must die, and die eternally, Psa. lx, 11; Lam. iv, 16, 17.

2. *Because the stores of Divine goodness cannot be exhausted.* Gratitude to an earthly benefactor will often prevent us from being importunate in our requests, lest by giving to us, he should impoverish himself; but this cannot be the case with the bread

that cometh down from heaven, for that is undiminishable, Eph. iii, 18, 19.

3. *Because it always will retain its efficacy and virtue.* Unalterable in quantity, it is also unchangeable in quality, Heb. xiii, 8.

4. *Because it does not induce satiety.* Earthly food is too gross to allow its unintermitting use; but on the contrary, as we receive this divine bread, our capacities to make use of it are enlarged, and our appetite increased for its continued communication.

5. *Because in the world to come it will constitute our joy and felicity.* Christ will still be the only delight of his saints, and will be their exceeding great reward for ever and ever, Rev. vii, 9—17.

NOTICE,

1. This bread must be sought with penitence, Matt. v, 4.
2. This bread will be found by faith, John iii, 36.
3. This bread must be received with gratitude, Psa. xcii, 1.

Have my hearers ever received the blessing of which we have spoken? if not, let the language of your hearts be, "Lord, evermore give us this bread;" for "Blessed is he that shall eat this bread in the kingdom of God."

BETA.

XXXIV.—*A Missionary Report.*

ACTS XV, 3.

"And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren."

THE apostles of our Lord laboured in the work of the ministry with great success, and many Jews and Gentiles were converted to God through their instrumentality; but some of the Jews, still attached to the rite of circumcision, went down to Antioch, and caused no small dissension and disputation with Paul and Barnabas. Then those apostles, with certain other of the church, went up to Jerusalem, to confer with the apostles and elders about that question; "and, being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria,

declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and caused great joy unto all the brethren." On this important passage, which we may consider as an ancient missionary report, we shall make the following general observations :—

I. THE APOSTLES OF OUR LORD WERE ITINERANT PREACHERS.

1. *The commission which those holy men received from their Lord and Master required them to itinerate.* The Son of Man came into the world "to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke xix, 10; and, before he returned to his Father, he commanded his apostles to go "into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature," Mark xvi, 15. Had they remained in Judea, Christianity would have perished in its infancy, and the devil would have triumphed over the nations.

2. *The nature of their work rendered itineracy absolutely necessary.* But what had they to do? They had to enlighten a dark world, Acts xxvi, 18; to seek the wandering sons of men, who were without Christ and God, Eph. ii, 12; and to lift up the Son of Man as a saving remedy for the whole world, as Moses had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, as a remedy for the wounded Israelites, John iii, 14, 15.

3. *Influenced by the best of feelings, they entered on the arduous work of itineracy with a ready mind.* They felt the love of Christ in their hearts, 2 Cor. v, 14; they viewed a perishing world with *pity*, and joyfully preached "among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," Eph. iii, 8. Having received power, after the Holy Ghost came upon them, they became witnesses unto Jesus "in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the *uttermost part of the earth*," Acts i, 8.

4. *Being divinely assisted, they laboured in the itinerant work with all their might.* Had they been left to themselves, they could have done nothing; but through Christ strengthening them, they could do all things, Phil. iv, 13. In his strength, they were "instant in season and out of season," 2 Tim. iv, 2; preached day and night, Acts xx, 7—11; visited the people from house to house, Acts xx, 20; and were never ashamed of the gospel of Christ, Rom. i, 16.

5. *The circuit in which they travelled was widely extended.* It is said that Andrew preached the gospel in Scythia; Bartholomew in India; John in the lesser Asia; Paul in Spain and Britain; and that all the rest had their particular provinces allotted to them. Thus, "their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world," Rom. x, 18.

6. *As they went on, they planted churches, and appointed pas-*

tors to watch over the flocks. It would have been highly improper to have left a church without a pastor; as in that case, grievous wolves would have devoured the flocks. Their usual plan was to ordain elders, or the first fruits of their ministry, in every church; and then they passed on, formed other churches, and ordained other pastors, Acts xiv, 23, 24.

7. *Had the itinerant plan continued, it is probable that all the nations would have been acquainted with Christianity many hundred years ago.* When the apostles were called to their reward, others should have succeeded them in this glorious work; but when itineracy ceased, and the ministers of Jesus localized themselves, the nations were left in darkness; and Christianity, which was designed to bless all mankind, was localized. Thank God, the itinerant work has been resumed; and, in spite of earth and hell, the nations of the earth will be evangelized, Mal. i, 11.

II. WHEN THEY WENT FROM PLACE TO PLACE, THE CHURCHES HELPED THEM ON THEIR WAY.

1. *They were helped on their way by pecuniary aid.* Paul worked with his hands, and ministered to his own necessities on some occasions, Acts xviii, 3, xx, 34; but he has proved that those who preach the gospel, should be supported by the people, 1 Cor. ix, 1—15. His wants had been supplied by the brethren of Macedonia, 2 Cor. xi, 9; and when he and his friends left Melita, the people laded them with such things as were necessary, Acts xxviii, 10.

2. *It is probable that they were helped on their way frequently, by the cheering company of pious persons.* On this journey, Paul and Barnabas, and other persons, went up to Jerusalem *together;* and it seems that pious women accompanied them, on some occasions, to minister to their wants, 1 Cor. ix, 5. When Paul was going to Rome, the brethren came to meet him at Appii forum, for which he thanked God, and took courage, Acts xxviii, 15.

3. *And they were helped on their way by the prayers of the people.* The apostle Paul requested the prayers of the church for himself and his brethren in the ministry, that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified, 2 Thess. iii, 1; and when any of the apostles were in imminent danger, the church prayed for them without ceasing, Acts xii, 5. And if we pray for our missionaries, it will be a blessing both to them and to us.

III. GENTILES WERE CONVERTED TO GOD BY THE ITINERANT LABOURS OF THE APOSTLES; AND, WHEN THEY VISITED

THE CHURCHES, THEY GAVE AN ACCOUNT OF THEIR CONVERSIONS.

1. *The word convert, from* converto, *signifies to turn about.* The Gentiles had been in gross darkness, but were turned about to the light of the Lord, Eph. v, 8; they had been under the tyranny of Satan, but were turned to God, Acts xxviii, 18; they had worshipped dumb idols, but were turned about to worship the only living and true God. In short, they turned to God in their thoughts, desires, affections, words, and works, and became new creatures in Christ Jesus, 2 Cor. v, 17.

2. *Their conversion to God produced happy results.* Their sins were forgiven, Eph. i, 7; they had peace with God, Rom. v, 1; they were filled with sacred joy, Rom. xv, 13; they obtained a blessed hope of immortality, 1 Thess. v, 8; they lived in peace with men, 2 Cor. xiii, 11; were obedient to parents and governors; and did good to all men, especially to the household of faith, Gal. vi, 10.

3. *The relation of those conversions would be very useful to the churches.* We may venture to affirm, that those early missionary reports were delivered with great *plainness;* that they were confined to real *facts;* that they were accompanied with many affecting anecdotes of apostolic labours, sufferings, and dangers; that they excited the early Christians to vigorous exertions; and that they strengthened the faith of believers in the prophecies and promises of the holy Scriptures, respecting the future glory of Messiah's kingdom, Psa. ii, 8; Rev. xi, 15.

IV. ALL THE BRETHREN WERE GLAD TO HEAR OF THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

1. *Men of one nation are generally at enmity with those of other nations.* Hence we may account for bloody wars, which have destroyed millions of the human race; and on this diabolical principle we can account for the infernal joy with which they hear of each other's calamities.

2. *But Christianity promotes brotherly love, and expands benevolent feelings.* It is the only religion in which all the nations of the earth can unite; it is calculated to bind the whole world together in the cords of love; and the moment we feel its sweet influences, we embrace all men in the arms of pity and compassion. Other religions, as they are called, divide and separate men from each other, and destroy the peace and harmony of the great human family.

3. *Under the influence of Jesus' religion, the first Christians felt great joy, when they heard of the conversion of the Gentiles.*

No man of sober reflection will venture to say that all the Gentile nations must have been damned, if they had not been converted to Christianity; but it may be affirmed that their state was, and now is, awfully dangerous, and deplorably wretched and miserable. Allowing this, it will follow, that Christians will ever feel great joy when those aliens are brought into a *safe* and *happy* state; and also because Jesus, whom they love, is honoured, and God, whom they adore, is glorified.

Finally, we can prove that all men need the gospel, and that it was designed for *all*. Then, as God may enable us, let us carry it to all; and let all the churches come forward, and help in this glorious cause. Amen.

SIGMA.

XXXV.—*Christian Ministers, and their Work.*

ACTS xvi, 17.

"These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation."

FROM the context we learn, that Paul and Silas were directed by a vision to go to Macedonia, ver. 6—12. Lydia, being converted to God at Philippi, received them into her house, ver. 13, 15; from whence they were followed by a female, possessed with a spirit of divination, who cried, saying, "These men," &c. This testimony, though true, had a tendency to lessen their authority, as the natural inference was, that they were in league with her. The apostle Paul, seeing it in all its bearings, expelled the demon; which occasioned violent persecution, ver. 16—24. The words of our text, however, are true, full, clear, and distinct; let us, therefore, notice,

I. THE IMPORTANT WORK OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS; viz. to show unto mankind the way of salvation; in doing which, it is necessary that they should,

1. *Define the nature of this salvation.* It is spiritual, and imports, 1. A deliverance from *contracted guilt.* The design of the gospel is to give a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, Luke i, 77. Hence Peter and his coadjutors, when brought before the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, asserted that "Jesus whom the Jews had crucified, God had exalted with his right hand to be a Prince, and a Saviour," &c, Acts v, 31; and Paul, preach-

ing at Antioch, said, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sin," &c, Acts xiii, 38, 39. 2. *The bondage of sin;* hence the gospel is the power of God to salvation, Rom. i, 16; delivering the believer from the dominion of sin, Rom. vi, 22; and empowering his feebleness to do "the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God," Rom. viii, 2, 3. 3. *Its moral pollution;* Tit. iii, 5; in which text the apostle shows that we are saved by the washing of regeneration, &c; while John asserts, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John i, 5. 4. *Its fatal consequences;* in the everlasting happiness of the soul. Believers are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. i, 5; and to such Jesus will appear the second time without sin unto salvation, Heb. ix, 28. So that it imports, not only a deliverance from all moral evil and its consequences, but it secures the enjoyment of grace here, and glory hereafter, Rev. xii, 10.

2. *Develope its source;*—The pure, disinterested, unmerited, unparalleled, and unsolicited mercy of God, John iii, 16. In contemplating the scheme of redemption, which originated in the eternal mind, we may exclaim, in the language of John, "Behold *what manner* of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," 1 John iii, 1. Such love as this furnishes a subject for the everlasting contemplation of men and angels.

3. *Proclaim its Author;*—the Lord Jesus Christ: for so hath the Lord said, "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation to the ends of the earth," Acts xiii, 47. "And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him," Heb. v, 9. "God hath appointed us to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Thess. v, 9. "Neither is there salvation in any other," Acts iv, 12.

4. *Point out its necessity;*—By showing the *nature* of sin, 1 John iii, 4;—its *source*, Mark vii, 21, 22;—its *universal dominion*, Rom. v, 12, iii, 10–19;—and the irrevocable decree of God, Luke xiii, 3; John iii, 3; Heb. ii, 3, xii, 14.

5. *Explain its appointed method;*—1. *Repentance*, Mark i, 15;—originating in conviction of sin, Rom. vii, 9;—accompanied by sorrow for sin, 2 Cor. vii, 10;—manifested by reformation from sin, Luke xix, 8;—and expressed in ardent prayer to God, Luke xviii, 13. 2. *Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, Acts xx, 21;—faith in his person and offices, importing a full reliance

in his merits for pardon and acceptance, Rom. iii, 24, 25;—a living faith, which subjects the soul to Christ in the way of obedience, Gal. v, 6.

II. THEIR HIGH DESIGNATION;—"Servants of the most high God:" which imports,

1. *That their commission is from God.* To them he has said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," &c, Mark xvi, 18. And their reply to the church is the language of the apostle, Eph. iii, 8. They are servants, "having this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God," 2 Cor. iv, 7. Hence they can say, "as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts," 1 Thess. ii, 4.

2. *Their supplies are divine.* Their Master hath said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii, 20. In seasons of discouragement he says, "My grace is sufficient for thee," 2 Cor. xii, 9;—"Go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord," Jer. i, 8.

3. *Their success is from God.* A minister may be sound in his judgment, orthodox in his creed, logical in his definitions, correct in his enunciation, rhetorical in his discourses, pathetic in his appeals, powerful in his application, and yet unsuccessful in winning souls; "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase," 1 Cor. iii, 7. St. Paul, who was chief of the apostles, felt this, when he said, "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified," 2 Thess. iii, 1. Ministers are God's servants,—to their own Master they stand or fall; they devoutly acknowledge the good done on earth, the Lord alone does it; hence their appeals to God for the aid of the Holy Ghost, without whom 'nothing is wise, or strong, or good.' It remains for us, therefore, to notice,

III. THE DUTY OF THOSE AMONG WHOM PROVIDENCE MAY DIRECT THEIR LABOURS; which is,

1. *To receive their message.* "Whosoever," said Christ to his disciples, "shall not receive you nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet," &c, Matt. x, 14, 15. Need we wonder that our Lord should say, "Take heed how ye hear?" Luke viii, 18. Let no man trifle with God's message, however feeble the instrument who has delivered it.

2. *Support their characters.* "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses," 1 Tim. v, 19:—"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," 1 Chron. xvi, 22.

3. *Respect their office.* "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and esteem them very highly in love, for their works' sake," 1 Thess. v, 12, 13.

4. *Supply their wants.* "For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things," Rom. xv, 27; 1 Tim. v, 17; 1 Cor. ix, 1—10.

5. *Facilitate their labours.* This you should do by, 1. *Your prayers*, Eph. vi, 18, 19; 1 Thess. v, 25; 2. *Your influence*, in its weight and extent.

APPLICATION.

To you is the word of this salvation sent. Have you received the truth? Do you enjoy the salvation of the gospel? If you have not obeyed the gospel, how awful your state! 1 Pet. iv, 17. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

KAPPA.

XXXVI.—*Christian Forbearance.*

ROMANS xii, 17.

"Recompense to no man evil for evil."

HOWEVER mortifying it may be to our pride and vanity to be frequently reminded of our fallen and degraded condition, yet to a candid inquirer after truth, it will very readily and very satisfactorily appear, that the inspired writers always consider our present state as a state of moral imperfection and disorder. Even where they do not express this unwelcome truth, they nevertheless assume it; and on this ground, they give directions and advice directly opposed to the feelings and cravings of human nature. All writers on morality, indeed, have seen the necessity of proceeding, more or less, on the same principles. Other moralists have, however, wanted the important sanctions of a

"thus saith the Lord," and a clear revelation of a future state of righteous retribution; while, at the same time, they have scarcely ventured to touch what may be called, the higher branches of the morality of the gospel. It is in the sacred Scriptures, therefore, that we are most powerfully urged to oppose the irregularities of both our appetites and our passions. And the same authority, and the same sanctions, which forbid "rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness," forbid also "strife and envy;" and in our text, enjoin us to "recompense to no man evil for evil." This injunction is very comprehensive, and should therefore be explained; it is "a hard saying," and should therefore be enforced.

I. EXPLAIN THE INJUNCTION;—"Recompense," &c. Every body knows that the general idea attached to the term "evil," is that of something wrong, or pernicious, or both. What is here meant by the apostle seems to be any thing evil in *intention*, as well as in *effect*. If my neighbour and myself happen to be in the same line of business, his innocent arrangements and proceedings may affect my sales and profits, without any unfriendly intention on his part. But our text refers to injury carelessly or maliciously inflicted. Various are the ways in which, according to this view of the subject, one person may receive evil from another. Instance,

1. *By injury of his property*,—whether by secret fraud, or by open violence, Job i, 14, 15.

2. *By injury of his person;* as in the case mentioned Luke x, 30; a case that may possibly occur to any of us, and in which property and person are both injured.

3. *By injury of his reputation.* Few persons stand so fair and firm in public esteem, that their character may not suffer by shameless falsehood, or sly misrepresentations, &c. See the case of Joseph, Gen. xxxix, 13–19;—of Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. xix, 24–30;—of Paul, Rom. iii, 8.

4. *By injury of his peace.* By a malicious derangement of your plans, an evil disposed person may cause a vexatious waste of your time, and frustrate your intention; or, in public or private, may use such language as he knows is most likely to tantalize you. And even where no words are employed, the scornful air, the scowling eye, &c, may be made to speak unutterable things of insult and of mischief. But,

5. *As evil may thus be received in our own persons, so it may also reach us through the persons of our friends.* That man knows little of the tender enjoyments of domestic life, who has

not observed that a faithful and affectionate wife is more painfully affected by any thing that reflects on her husband's character, or that disturbs his peace, than by a direct insult offered to herself. Nor can a husband be regardless of her whom he has pledged himself to cherish as well as to love. So in the case of parents, children, friends; we "*weep with them that weep.*" Now, with this view of the case, mark *how extensive* is the requirement;—"Recompense to *no* man *evil for evil.*" But it may be asked, 'Are we then to allow a person who has robbed and wounded, and who intended to murder us, to roam at large, and commit fresh depredations, when we have an opportunity of bringing him to justice?' No;—yet, even in this extreme case we are bound to guard the principle here laid down, and to avoid the *spirit*, as well as the *act* of *retaliation*, which renders *evil* FOR *evil*, and which is essentially, and always wrong;—"Dearly beloved, AVENGE not yourselves," &c, ver. 19. You are sometimes obliged to have recourse to measures of severity towards an offending child. In such case, the object should be, not to *punish* for the fault committed, but to *correct* the bad disposition which led to it, and thus to promote *the amendment* of the offender, and prevent a recurrence of the evil. So, in the case before supposed, the correction of the offender, or the prevention of farther mischief, what you owe to your neighbours and to yourself, your creditors and your family, may furnish sufficient reason for your availing yourself of the protection of the law, but not for assuming that *vengeance* which belongeth to the Lord, and which he hath engaged to repay, ver. 19. From a vindictive spirit of retaliation, therefore, injure no man's property, person, reputation, or peace. This recommendation is certainly not very agreeable to the dispositions of corrupt nature, and perhaps not very accordant to our practice and habits. We must therefore,

II. ENFORCE THE INJUNCTION. In order to which, consider,

1. *The calamities which have, in all ages, resulted from the opposite practice.* Trifling affronts, which at first might have been easily overlooked, have been resented and overpaid—the retaliation has been deemed a sufficient cause for fresh outrage—and the contending parties, whether individuals, families, or nations, have continued to "bite and devour one another," to their mutual injury, and, perhaps, destruction. Hence we may remark,

2. *The personal advantage to be derived from obedience.* The

spirit here inculcated preserves the mind unruffled, when resentment would only serve to rouse it into storm, and tempest, and distraction. That was a wise and characteristic remark, which a good man once made to his friend, whom he observed to be affected by the ridicule of scorners;—'My brother, it does not even stick to our clothes.' So true is the saying, that 'revenge, though sweet, is not profitable;' the profit, the advantage, is all on the side of placability. Whence,

3. *The peace and happiness of our friends will be preserved and promoted by our obedience.* Quarrels and revenge seldom or never end with the persons immediately concerned. Family connections and friends are involved in all the animosity and in all the suffering; and the lovers of peace are grieved to "behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth," James iii, 5, 6. Wherefore, on this account also, "Bless, and curse not," Prov. xvii, 14; Rom. xii, 14. This conduct is recommended by,

4. *The honour which attaches to it.* Warriors and duellists seem to think that honour lies on the other side. Hence, as men of honour, they rashly dare death and damnation. But self-conquest is most difficult of attainment; and therefore, even on their own principles, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty," &c, Prov. xvi, 22. Agreeable to this is the wise man's judgment, Prov. xix, 11. And on the same ground the apostle advises, "Be not (ingloriously) *overcome* of evil," &c, Rom. xii, 21. Here we should observe, that in professors of religion especially, "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" is quite in character. Our adversaries expect it: and if they find us ever ready to demand "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,"—to resent, and to retaliate, our inconsistency will not honour, but disgrace, both our religion and ourselves, ver. 20; 2 Tim. ii, 24, 25.

5. *The forbearance of God, and his goodness to the offending, recommend the apostle's charge.* See Rom. ii, 4; see also Matt. v, 38—48; where Jesus himself specifies the marks and terms of our *sonship*, and the proofs of *Christian perfection*, verses 45, 48.

6. *The example of the Saviour challenges this imitation of his conduct.* Hear his reproof of his warm disciples, Luke ix, 51—56; and Peter's remark respecting him—"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again," &c, 1 Pet. ii, 18—23. If we have obtained pardoning mercy, then,

7. *The obligation arising from God's mercy to us binds us to the exercise of mercy.* Has he forgiven us much?—We ought

therefore to forgive. Thus the apostle, Eph. iv, 31, 32; Col. iii, 12, 13. And to all these arguments from the *propriety*, *consistency*, *utility*, &c, we may add one from the *necessity* of the thing; for,

Finally, *The salvation of our souls depends on the conduct enjoined.* We do not, however, consider forgiveness of injuries as the *procuring cause* of salvation;—that is the atoning blood of Christ, Col. i, 14;—or as the *instrumental cause;*—that is living faith, Rom. v, 1:—yet we cannot but regard it as a condition of salvation, a *sine qua non*, while we hear the Saviour declare, that without this we can neither *obtain* the privileges of pardon, Matt. vi, 12, 14, 15,—nor *retain* those privileges, Matt. xviii, 21—35. "With the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again;" and "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath showed no mercy," Luke vi, 37, 38: James ii, 13.

INFER,

1. If retaliation be wrong, then how *wicked* and how *dangerous* must unprovoked aggression be, 1 Thess. iv, 6.

2. How God-like the character and conduct of the peacemaker, Matt. v, 9. Let us therefore admire and emulate.

ZETA.

XXXVII.—*The Shame of living without the Knowledge of God.*

1 CORINTHIANS XV, 34.

"For some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."

IN reading the epistolary correspondence which the apostles had with the primitive churches, we cannot fail to observe the genuine and ardent affection which they felt for the people of their charge: they were gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children; willing not to impart the gospel of God only, but also their own souls, because they were dear unto them. But this affection never dwindled into an effeminate fondness, which winked at their follies, or tolerated their errors. No, they were faithful men; they used no flattering words, nor kept back any thing that was profitable unto the people. Hear

what the apostle said, in writing to the Corinthians, "I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth:" and, to go no farther than the text, what a proof of fidelity and great plainness of speech have we in this passage;—"Some have not the knowledge of God," &c. Happy would your ministers be, if this text were inapplicable to *their* congregations, and had *they* no reason to adopt the same language: but the ignorance, stupidity, and profligateness of multitudes around us, induce us to believe that a subject of this kind may not be uninteresting nor unprofitable. We will therefore notice three things.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. This is a phrase that frequently occurs in the Bible; and it must be understood as referring, either to that knowledge of God which is obtained by reflecting on his works—perusing his word—or by a revelation of himself to the mind.

1. *There is a knowledge of God obtained by reflecting on his works.* Thus "the heavens declare the glory of God," &c, Psa. xix. 1; "That which may be known of God is manifest in them," &c, Rom. i, 19. By reflecting on these works, we may know something of God;—his wisdom in planning the amazing whole;—his power in producing such stupendous orbs;—and his goodness in providing for such an immense variety of creatures, all of which wait upon him. If you survey a complex piece of machinery, which involves a thousand movements, and produces surprising effects, you not only infer that it was formed by some person, but you admire the workman through a knowledge of his work.

2. *There is a knowledge of God obtained by perusing his word.* The Bible reveals God to us in his spirituality, John iv, 24;—his eternity, Psa. xc, 2;—immensity, Psa. cxxxix, 7—10;—immutability, Mal. iii, 6; James i, 17;—justice, Gen. xviii, 25;—truth, Deut. xxxii, 4;—longsuffering, 2 Pet. iii, 9; &c. The information we obtain from the Bible, concerning God, is pure in its source, flowing from the Holy Ghost; and circumstantial in detail, as it not only represents God as being good, holy, just, &c, but exhibits proofs of his goodness, holiness, and justice.

3. *There is a knowledge of God by a revelation of himself to the mind.* This knowledge has been usually termed *experimental*, as it is obtained, not by any inference drawn from God's works, nor even by reading his word, but from the direct influence of the Holy Ghost, taking of the things of God, and showing them unto us. This knowledge does not refer so much to what God is

in himself as what he is to us;—our Father, Rom. viii, 15, 16;—our Saviour, Isa. xii, 1, 2;—our portion, Lam. iii, 24;—our God, Psa. lxxiii, 25, 26. All knowledge is influential; and thus, knowledge of God produces *love to him*, 1 John iv, 7, 8;—*confidence in him*, Psa. ix, 10;—*obedience to him*, 1 John ii, 3, 4.

II. SOME HAVE NOT THIS KNOWLEDGE. This is true of a vast majority of mankind: millions of men are now alive, who never heard of God. But it is not with heathens and savages that we have at present to do: the individuals who come more immediately under our notice, may all be ranked in one or other of the following classes;—avowed infidels, profligate sinners, or nominal Christians.

1. *Avowed infidels have not the knowledge of God.* Such there have always been. In the days of David there were fools, who said in their heart that there was no God, or who thought that God was such a one as themselves. When Christ was upon earth, there were Sadducees, who said there was neither angel nor spirit. And in the apostolic age there were those who denied the only Lord God, and denied the Lord that bought them, 2 Pet. ii, 1; Jude 3. And in the present day there are individuals who glory in their infidelity, and are not ashamed to declare that they know not God, and desire not the knowledge of his ways.

2. *Profligate sinners have not the knowledge of God.* These abound in every department of society; drunkards, swearers, liars, sabbath-breakers, unclean persons, &c; who declare their sin as Sodom; they hide it not. O what ignorance of God prevails, where vices so glaring hold such uncontrolled dominion! To produce arguments to prove that such persons have not the knowledge of God is totally unnecessary.

3. *Nominal Christians have not the knowledge of God.* In this class we include all who have the form of godliness, but who deny the power thereof; who name the name of Christ, hear his ministers, attend his ordinances, and support his cause; but who are ignorant of God's righteousness, and who go about to establish their own righteousness. Look at the Pharisee in the temple, or at Saul of Tarsus, who touching the righteousness of the law was blameless, and yet how ignorant of God!

III. THIS WAS SPOKEN TO THEIR SHAME. Shame is reproach, disgrace, or ignominy; but wherein consists the disgrace of not knowing God?

1. *Consider the object of this knowledge.* A being who unites in himself all possible perfections;—how disgraceful to live in

ignorance of God! A being to whom we are under so many obligations, which call for returns of gratitude and obedience;—what a shame to *live* without knowing the God in whom we *live*, and by whom we are fed, supported, and defended through every period of our being!

2. *Consider the congeniality of this knowledge with the nature of man.* Our first parents were invested with a large share of it; and the human soul was formed for its possession. God is the only object in the universe capable of gratifying that intense and inextinguishable thirst for knowledge which is characteristic of man. The human spirit by an endless progression in knowledge, may comprehend all that creation can furnish; but in God there are endless attractions, and infinite room for the soul to expand its powers, and extend its researches. What a shame for a man to have a soul, endowed with a capacity for the attainment of this knowledge, and yet to live without it!

3. *Consider the means afforded us for obtaining this knowledge.* Had we been born among Turks, Hottentots, or Hindoos, or even in some Catholic countries, we might have partially escaped the *disgrace* of living without the knowledge of God: but the means with which we are favoured, leave us without excuse, and render our ignorance of God the subject of the deepest disgrace.

4. *Consider the ease with which this knowledge may be secured.* Human knowledge is often obtained with difficulty: what various reading, deep research, and laborious mental investigation are necessary, in order to acquire knowledge in philosophy!—how hard it is to climb the steep where the temple of science is situated!—but how easy to obtain divine knowledge! "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," &c, Jas. i, 5. Prayer will secure the agency of that Spirit, by which you will know all things. What a shame, then, to neglect to avail ourselves of this advantage, which will secure the knowledge of God.

5. *Consider the happinesss which you will forego, and the misery you will share, by living without this knowledge.* "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God," &c. This is the evidence, the foretaste, and the consummation of eternal life. How shameful to relinquish this! "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven," &c, "taking vengeance on them that know not God, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction," &c, 2 Thess. i, 7—9. Then such will awake to shame and everlasting contempt, Dan. xii, 2.

We conclude by observing,

1. How important is the knowledge of God! How insignifi

cant is human science, when put in competition with this! The period will soon arrive, when all that knowledge which is prized so much, and sought with so much avidity in this world, will vanish away, and the knowledge of God only will remain.

2. How solicitous should we be to ascertain whether we are in the possession of this knowledge. Some have not the knowledge of God! Let us examine ourselves. The more we know of God, the more humble we shall be: human knowledge puffeth up; divine knowledge renders us lowly, &c.

3. How shameful to live without the knowledge of God! Sin is a reproach to any people; and especially to us—Britons—Protestants—professing Christians; a reproach to our understandings, hearts, and lives; and will, if persisted in, be our eternal reproach.

BETA.

XXXVIII.—*Conversation in Heaven.*

PHILIPPIANS iii, 20.

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

JESUS CHRIST with propriety said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." It necessarily must be, that what *most* interests the affections, will *most* engross the thoughts, and excite efforts to obtain it. Hence it is, that all those who have received God's testimony respecting the invisible world, and have transferred their affections to it, have their conversation in heaven. Thus the apostle describes the experience and practice of Christians of the age in which he lived; and the same principles must still operate in the same way. If then we are Christians, *our* treasure and our hearts will be in heaven: in other words, our affections will be there, and consequently our conversation. That we may have a test of our experience, and be roused to place our affections where they ought to be, allow me,

I. TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE IMAGE UNDER WHICH THE HEAVENLY STATE IS HERE SPOKEN OF; viz. a well-regulated polity. It was under this image that the patriarchs sought it, Heb. xi, 10—16. Were all the noble architects now in being, accompanied by those of ancient Greece and Rome, to meet

together, to form the plan of a city that should excel for situation, convenience, beauty, and magnificence, men might innocently be allowed to boast of it, to travel far to see it, and sacrifice much to obtain a residence in it. But what comparison would there be between such a city and that alluded to in my text? We have a lofty description given of it, Rev. xxi, 2, 10, 27, where every thing is displayed which is calculated to strike the attention, and allure the senses. But we may heighten our conceptions of this city from an examination of the present frame of nature, which was created for an inferior creature in a state of probation. In this habitation, we see convenience, pleasure, and magnificence, combined in an eminent degree;—what then must be the habitation of the spirits of just men made perfect, of angels, of the whole family of God in its most perfect state, and of God himself? There is order without coercion; a society the most intimate, intelligent, pure, and edifying; there are the richest immunities, and no more curse, Rev. xx, 3; no more death, no more pain, no more sickness, no more sorrow, Rev. xxi, 4; a perpetual glory superseding sun and moon, Rev. xxi, 23; a perfect enjoyment of the Divine presence, Rev. xxi, 3; a perfect and perpetual reign of purity, Rev. xxi, 27, xxii, 15;—of pleasure, Psa. xvi, 11;—and of repose, Heb. iv, 9; Rev. xiv, 13.

II. THAT EVERY DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST HAS AN INTEREST IN THIS HEAVENLY STATE; being a member of this polity—a denizen of this city of habitation and glory. It is not every heir of immortality that *has* an interest in this divine polity; not yet has every professor and claimant of interest an acknowledged right in it, Matt. vii, 21; but every one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, who learns of him, and who submits to him, has an acknowledged and an indisputable right in this blessed state: this he has, by virtue of that charter which gives it to such characters as answer to the above description, John iii, 16, 36, vi, 40. This state is promised, 1 John ii, 25. All Christians possess the same qualifications for this state, Matt. v, 8; and they have received the earnest of it into their hearts, Ephes. i, 13, 14. Besides, all their friends, who in their generation lived wisely, and died honourably, reside there. There is their elder Brother and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ; and there also is their heavenly Father. In short, the most ancient and best branches of the Christian's family live in that blessed residence. No wonder then that he should feel a peculiar interest in this polity. But this leads me to observe.

III. THAT THE CHRISTIAN'S INTEREST IN THIS POLITY HAS A PECULIAR INFLUENCE OVER HIS CONDUCT IN THE PRESENT WORLD. "His conversation is in heaven;" as,

1. *It leads him to confess himself to be but a stranger, a sojourner, and a pilgrim on the earth*, Psa. xxxix, 12. The same confession was made by all the ancient worthies; as Paul tells us, Heb. xi, 13.

2. *It leads him to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against his soul, or his heavenly interests*, 1 Pet. ii, 11. And,

3. *It leads him to set his affections on things above, and seek them*, Col. iii, 1, 2. This seeking the things above is the same as having our conversation in heaven; and implies an endeavour to strengthen our faith in their existence;—a care not to nullify our title to this felicity, by any of our proceedings on earth;—an effort to conduct all our earthly affairs in a manner suitable to our dignity;—and an unvaried assiduity in this holy course to the end of life, 2 Pet. i, 5—11, iii, 14. But observe,

IV. THAT THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT OBSTACLE TO THE IMMEDIATE ATTAINMENT OF THIS GOOD, IS HIS CONNECTION WITH THE BODY. Some have supposed that the body of man in a state of innocence was capable of inheriting the glory of God without undergoing any previous change. But this supposition either overlooks the apostle's general principle, 1 Cor. xv, 50, or does not see its bearing on this subject. Perhaps it is on account of its incapacity to inherit the glory of God in its present state, that it is called a vile body, composed of comparatively vile materials, Gen. iii, 19;—vile, as through its weakness it often unfits us for the exercises of religion and devotion;—and vile, as it has, by the introduction of sin into the world, so greatly endangered our salvation, either through its love of pleasure, or its dread of suffering. This body has been aptly designated 'The body of our humiliation;' as in the mean time it keeps us out of the glory of God, and so much risks our total seclusion thence. To dissolve his connection with this body, no Christian dares, though others unbelievingly and fearlessly rush on to the commission of this desperate wickedness; and change his body no Christian can. To immortalize the body is the prerogative of Christ alone, as he only possesses such power as is requisite to subdue all things to his will and pleasure, ver. 21. Observe therefore,

V. THAT THE CHRISTIAN IS DIRECTING HIS EXPECTANT EYES, AND HIS MOST FERVENT WISHES, TO THE DISPARTING HEAVENS, FOR THE RETURNING SAVIOUR;—as it is only at, and by his appearing, that he will be fully meetened to inherit the glory

of God. With respect to most of the saints, the Saviour will have dissolved their connection with the body long before his second appearing; but he will defer the immortalizing of the bodies of any (with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, who were translated) until his return from heaven, for the salvation of his people. Then will St. Paul's elegant and sublime description of this scene (1 Cor. xv, 50—57) be realized; and our bodies will not only undergo a simple change, but be "fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," or, as we are told the original signifies, the body of his glory. Like his body, ours will become spiritual, incorruptible, impassible, vigorous, and glorious; all this is not only possible, or probable, but gloriously certain.

To conclude:

How much more are earthly-minded men to be pitied, since heaven is so far superior to the object of their affections! Perhaps some of you are endeavouring to excuse them by suggesting that probably their minds are set on both worlds; but have you considered that this is impossible, as they cannot serve both God and mammon? Heaven never will be given to those whose god is their belly—who glory in their shame—and who mind earthly things. No—their end will be destruction. Let those then who, to the present time, have been earthly-minded, immediately and deeply repent of their sin: and let it be the care and prayer of all, to have a sure title to eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

IOTA.

XXXIX.—*The Faith and Conduct of Moses.*

HEBREWS xi, 24—27.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," &c.

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1. IN the religious world, there is no observation more common or more correct than this, 'The Christian's life on earth is a warfare.' The truth of this assertion is undeniable; for we are called to fight the good fight of faith, that we may lay hold on eternal life, 1 Tim. vi, 12. And the promise of heavenly glory is made only to him that overcometh, Rev. iii, 21. "To him that overcometh," &c.

2. But though our enemies are numerous and formidable, we

need not be discouraged; for he that calls us to this warfare, equips us for the contest. By putting on and taking the whole armour of God, we become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, able to withstand in the evil day; and more than conquerors through him that hath loved us. Among those weapons with which we are furnished by the Captain of our salvation, there is no one, of which more excellent things are spoken, than of *faith:* by this God is said to purify our hearts—by this we are enabled to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one—and by this we overcome the world, 1 John v, 4. That it certainly overcomes the world, and how it does so, we learn from the interesting example now before us. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years," &c. Let us consider—The person of whom this account is given—his conduct as recited in our text—and the principle by which he was actuated.

I. THE PERSON OF WHOM THIS ACCOUNT IS GIVEN;—Moses. Of this great and good man much is recorded, and much may be said to his advantage; but on this occasion we shall only observe, that he was the subject of various distinguished excellencies, both *natural* and *adventitious*.

1. *Among his natural excellencies* we may notice—*The beauty of his person.* In Exodus ii, 2, we are informed "that he was a goodly child;" by Stephen it is said, "that he was exceeding fair," Acts vii, 20; and by St. Paul in this chapter, ver. 22, it is affirmed that "he was a proper child." Josephus also informs us, that 'after he was three years of age, he was such a miracle of a child for beauty and comeliness of stature, that people would stop, and stand gazing on him with delight and admiration.' Among his natural excellencies may also be included—*The strength of his understanding.* This was very conspicuous in the histories which he wrote, the laws which he enacted, and the discourses which he delivered. On these accounts it is truly said, "he was mighty in words," Acts vii, 22. To this we may add—*The firmness of his resolution.* This we find remained unshaken, though assaulted by the most pleasing allurements, and the most terrific threatenings. But among his natural excellencies, we must also include—*The dispassionate temper of his mind.* He uniformly appeared meek and calm amidst most trying and affecting occurrences, Num. xiv, 3.

2. *Among his adventitious excellencies*, we may notice—*His great learning.* He "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," Acts vii, 22. Hereby his strong mind was improved by arithmetic and geometry; by astronomy, and every

other branch of natural philosophy; by the studies of anatomy and medicine, history, politics, and poetry.—*His princely dignity:* he was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Exodus ii, 10. *His flattering prospects:* of abundant wealth, even the treasures of Egypt; of the highest worldly pleasures that wealth could procure; and perhaps of kingly honour, as presumptive heir to the throne.—*His high reputation:* he was mighty in deeds, Acts vii, 22. It is said by Josephus, that 'he was renowned for deeds of military valour, skill, and success.' Such was Moses, the person here spoken of; and as every thing respecting him must be interesting, let us consider,

II. His conduct as here recited. The things related concerning him, are,

1. *His refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.* "When he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." This refusal must imply—*The voluntary sacrifice of all his honours;* both of his princely titles and dignity:—and *the voluntary sacrifice of all his prospects;* his prospects of wealth, of pleasure, and of preferment.

2. *His choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God.* This implied the choice of *poverty* instead of *riches:* for the people of God were impoverished and enslaved by the Egyptians.—The choice of *reproach* instead of *honour:* for the people of God were abominated by their oppressors. This reproach is called the reproach of Christ; because it was most probably occasioned by the hope of salvation which the Israelites reposed in Christ as the promised Messiah, Gen. xlix, 10. The choice of *affliction* instead of *pleasure:* for the people of God were grievous sufferers, God himself being witness, Exod. iii, 7.

3. *His departure from Egypt:*—"He forsook Egypt." This refers to his departure with the Israelites after the infliction of the plagues;—when *he well knew that Pharaoh was displeased with him,* Exod. x, 28; and *when he had reason to expect the king's most cruel and dreadful vengeance;* compare Exod. x, 28, with xv, 9. As this conduct of Moses must excite the astonishment and ridicule of many, let us consider,

III. The principle by which he was actuated. This was faith. "By faith," &c.

1. *In his refusal and choice he had respect to the recompense of reward.*—The *recompense of reward* must mean the *retribution* dispensed by God to mankind in a *future* state. It comprises—The *eternal miseries* with which God will punish sinful indulgences, Rom. ii, 8, 9; and the *eternal enjoyments* with

which God will remunerate pious obedience, Rom. ii, 6, 7, 10. It could not mean an inheritance in the land of Canaan; this God had absolutely promised him; nor could this equal his sacrifices.—He *had respect to the recompense of reward.* The reward of sin he dreaded, and was careful to avoid: the reward of piety he firmly believed; deliberately preferred; earnestly sought; and confidently expected.

2. *In forsaking Egypt, he saw Him that is invisible:* that is, God, 1 Tim. i, 17.—*He saw Him*—in the symbol of his presence, on the mount of *Horeb*, Exod. iii, 1—10. At this interview Moses was commissioned by God to deliver the Israelites by leading them out of Egypt. And Moses *still kept God in view while executing his commission.* He still regarded God's *authority;* confided in his *protection;* and recollected the supreme importance of retaining his *favour.* Hence we perceive,

3. *This principle rendered the conduct of Moses evidently unexceptionable.—It cannot be ascribed either to rashness, or the influence of bad counsel;* for it was the result of his *free* choice, when the opposite objects were entirely within his reach, and when he was perfectly *competent* to make this choice. He made it when he was come to years; at the mature age of forty, Acts vii, 23. When he was far past the season of childish ignorance, and when he could not have been the subject of dotage.—*It cannot be justly charged with folly;* for by thus renouncing earthly riches, pleasures, and honours, which are but *momentary*, he obtained the favour of God, his heavenly King; and became entitled to the *eternal* riches, pleasures, and honours of grace and glory.—*It cannot be justly charged with disloyalty;* for no earthly king has a right to forbid what God commands, Acts iv, 19, v, 29.—*It cannot be justly charged with ingratitude* to Pharaoh's family; for by obeying God, we most effectually serve our connections, Deut. v, 59.

From this glorious example of Moses, learn,

1. *That those who desire salvation from sin and its consequences, must choose God for their Master, and his people for their companions,* Ruth i, 16, ii, 12.

2. *That this choice should be deliberate and voluntary,* Deut. xxx, 19, 20. Then it will be acceptable to God, Num. xiv, 24, and it will be satisfactory to ourselves, 2 Cor. i, 12. Do not defer this choice till age or bodily infirmity force it upon you, lest God should reject your offering, Mal. i, 13, 14.

3. *That the subjects of this choice must expect to suffer in consequence of it.*—Such suffering has been *common* in all ages,

Prov. xxix, 27; 1 Tim. iv, 10; 2 Tim. iii, 12.—Yet the *reproach of Christ* is *preferable* to all *earthly good*, 1 Pet. iv, 14; Matt. v, 9, 10; 2 Cor. vi, 17, 18.

4. *That this choice, when made, should be resolutely persisted in*, however it may be assaulted by the allurements of pleasure, or the terror of threatenings, Matt. xvi, 24—26.

5. *That strong faith will render us proof against all temptations.*—Oppose the *recompense of reward* to *worldly enticements*,—and the *favour of God* to the *displeasure of mankind*.

6 *That the course in the sequel proves highly advantageous.* All those who believe like Moses, and act like him, will be blessed like him;—with *the removal of difficulties*, Isa. xliii, 16;—with a useful life;—with *a triumphant death*;—and with *a glorious eternity*, 1 Sam. ii, 30; 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8.

ALPHA.

XL.—*A Consideration of Christ the best Antidote to Weariness and Fainting.*

HEBREWS xii, 3.

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

THE primitive Christians were the subjects of severe and complicated sufferings. Christ himself suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: and he taught his disciples to expect similar treatment, "Ye shall be hated of men for my name's sake," Matt. xiii, 13. The apostles instructed their converts in the same doctrine; and the author of this epistle reminded the persons to whom he wrote it, of what they had already endured, Heb. x, 32. But knowing the liability of human nature to shrink from sufferings, and the tendency of these sufferings to depress and overwhelm the mind, he urged upon their attention the interesting advice in the text; "For consider him," &c. We invert the order of this passage, and consider,

I. THE EVIL DEPRECATED;—To be "wearied and faint in your minds."

II. THE ANTIDOTE PRESENTED AGAINST IT;—"Consider him," &c.

I. THE EVIL DEPRECATED—is expressed in these words, "lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds:" these two words *wea-*

ried and *faint*, though not precisely synonymous in their signification, are yet nearly allied in their import. The former refers to a person who is worn down by hard labour; and the latter to that sinking of the soul, and depression of the spirits, which result from fatigue. The context will serve to cast light upon this subject. Here Christians are regarded as running in a race, ver. 1.—a race for eternal life—a race in which every impediment must be cast aside—which must be run with patience—a race which requires exertion, and demands all the energies of the soul. But in running this race, there is a danger of being wearied and faint in our minds. We infer this,

1. *From the moral disinclination there is in human nature to run this race.* Man's propensities and tendencies are all towards sin; he runs the downward road, and follows a multitude to do evil: and even when God enlightens the understanding to discover the evil of sin and the beauty of holiness, and changes the heart to love the truth, there are, too commonly, principles of depravity yet remaining, that impede our progress in our heavenly race; and if not guarded against, will produce weariness and faintness of mind.

2. *From the obstacles and dangers that lie in our way.* If the path to celestial happiness were strowed with flowers, and presented only carnal delights, few would get weary in pursuing it; but the reverse of this is the truth; it presents obstacles which seem insuperable, and dangers which are appalling. Here are the temptations of the devil—the frowns of the world—the storms of adversity—stones of stumbling and rocks of offence; and frequently the soul of the people is discouraged, because of the way.

3. *From the lengthened period of our sojourning upon earth.* If we gained the prize the moment we commenced the race, and won the victory immediately on our putting on the armour, there would be no danger of weariness; but frequently a long period of time intervenes; years of painful exercise, and complicated trials; and many who have begun well and endured long, have not made a good finish, but declined from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

4. *From the cautions, admonitions, and awful examples exhibited in the Scriptures.* Who can read such texts as the following, without inferring the possibility of being weary and faint in our minds? "If thou forsake him," &c, 1 Chron. xxviii, 9. "My people have committed two evils," &c. Jer. ii, 13. "The lost state of that man," &c, Matt. xii, 45. "Holding faith and a good conscience," &c, 1 Tim. i, 19; 2 Pet. ii, 22.

This being wearied and faint in our minds is an evil to be deprecated; the phraseology of the text is sufficiently indicative of this. *It is evil in its nature.* When a man is wearied, &c, what are we to infer from this? Why that the good within him is declining, and the evil predominating; that the light in him is becoming darkness. *It is evil in its agents:* "Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?" "This persuasion cometh not of him who calleth you." "An enemy hath done this." *It is evil in its tendencies.* It wounds the conscience, grieves the Holy Spirit, causes the friends of Zion to mourn, and the ministers of God to weep between the porch and the altar; makes hell triumphant; and, 'If angels tremble, 't is at such a sight,' &c. *It is evil in its end;* "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." "If any man draw back," &c, Heb. x, 38.

II. THE ANTIDOTE PRESENTED AGAINST IT. "Consider him," &c. The person to whom the text refers, is "Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." Here are two things to be regarded, First, what the apostle says *of* him; and Secondly, what he says *to* us.

1. "*He endureth contradiction,*" &c. This is a compound word, from *contra*, against, and *dictio*, speech or language; and it evidently means verbal opposition, or as it is rendered by Beza, the "speaking against of sinners." They spoke *against his person:* they said, "Is not this the carpenter?" Matt. xiii, 55, 56;—*against his character:* they called him "a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber," &c, Matt. xi, 19; they accused him of violating the sabbath day, &c;—*against his miracles:* they said, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub," Matt. xii, 24;—*against his companions:* they said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;"—*against his preaching:* hence they declared, he spoke blasphemy, because he made himself equal with God:—*against his government:* they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." In this contradiction of sinners, we see—*the most inexcusable ignorance*, Acts iii, 17; 1 Cor. ii, 8. But their ignorance was no excuse, as they possessed the means of knowing better.—*The most invincible prejudice.* The Jews had made up their minds to condemn Christ, without examining whether he was the Messiah or not.—*The most unparalleled insolence:* creatures insulting and contradicting their creator: what could be more insolent? But Christ endured this contradiction. We bear insults sometimes, because we are obliged to bear them; but Christ might have destroyed his enemies, "and dashed them in pieces as a potter's vessel."

2. "*Consider him*," &c.—*In his love*, which was infinitely disinterested, 'Love no where to be found less than divine;' love to the most unworthy; love that made the greatest sacrifices, endured the greatest privations, &c.—*In his humility.* "He who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation," &c.—*In his zeal for the interests of his heavenly Father.* See him driving the buyers and sellers from the temple, and his disciples remembering that it was written, "The zeal of thine house," &c.—*In his patience.* "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter," &c.—And *in his benevolent actions.* He "went about doing good." The word, which our translators have rendered "consider," is a very expressive word, and signifies that we should look at the Lord Jesus attentively, analyze the whole of his character, and compare his sufferings with ours. Are we tempted? let us consider his temptations. Are we persecuted? consider his persecutions. Are we sorrowful? consider his sorrows. This consideration of Christ will prove the most effectual antidote to weariness and fainting; as it will lead us to see, that neither dignity of person, purity of action, nor usefulness of life, can screen us from the attacks of persecution; and we shall cease to regard the cross as an offence, when borne by such an illustrious Leader. It will also serve to inspire us with courage to brave all the dangers, and submit to all the privations, to which we are subject. When the general of an army sleeps on the same cold ground with the troops, what soldier will dare to complain? And it will, finally, lead us to anticipate a glorious victory. Jesus, who once endured contradiction of sinners, is now at the right hand of God.

From the whole let us learn,

1. As Christians are liable to grow weary, &c, they should be on their guard against presumption and self-confidence.

2. Those who think most of Christ, will be most likely to secure a final triumph over all their enemies.

BETA.

XLI.—*Submission to God.*

JAMES iv, 7.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God."

JAMES was accustomed to deliver his instructions in laconic sentences, where little was said, but much meant; the words few, but the sense comprehensive and important: a very cursory perusal of this epistle will sufficiently confirm the truth of this observation. The text however may be considered as a practical illustration of it; "Submit yourselves therefore to God." In order to profit by this highly important admonition we will endeavour to,

I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THE SUBMISSION HERE ENJOINED.

II. URGE THE REASONS FOR REDUCING IT TO PRACTICE.

I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THE SUBMISSION HERE ENJOINED.

1. *We should submit to God in his authoritative sway.* God is a great King, "and his kingdom ruleth over all:" as a sovereign, he hath revealed laws, sanctioned by the highest authority, founded in immutable justice, and conducive to human happiness; to these laws we should submit, by forsaking sin, believing in Christ, reverencing God, loving our neighbour, &c.

2. *We should submit to God in his gracious influences.* God is the God of grace. His Spirit strives with man, illuminates his understanding, convinces him of sin, subdues his will, and sanctifies his affections. "Submit yourselves therefore to God." His Spirit may be quenched, the light that is in you may become darkness, "I have called, and ye refused," &c, Prov. i, 24. In submitting to God, prize the teachings of his Spirit, cherish his holy influences, covet earnestly the best gifts, and shun whatever will wound your consciences, or vex the Holy One of Israel.

3. *Submit yourselves to God in his providential dispensations.* Your circumstances are various: some are afflicted in body—some are oppressed with poverty—others sustain painful bereavements. Here you are too frequently accustomed to mur-

murr, to look at the situations of others with envy, and to entertain unworthy thoughts of God. But submission becomes you; it is God who afflicts, and he doeth it in mercy; cease therefore to complain, and humbly acquiesce in all his dispensations. This submission should be *voluntary*. There is a willing, and a forced submission. God will humble every man, either by his grace or justice; but we should willingly submit our understandings to his instructions, &c. It should be *universal;* there is a submission due to parents by children, to masters by servants, to princes by subjects, to husbands by wives, but these submissions are partial and temporary; but the submission in the text is universal; it admits of no exceptions, and knows no limits. It should be *constant*, at all times, in all circumstances, and in all situations.

II. URGE THE REASONS FOR REDUCING IT TO PRACTICE.

1. *We urge it from a consideration of the greatness and goodness of the Being to whom you are called to submit.* It is GOD, whose greatness is unsearchable, and whose power is infinite; who is above all, and through all, and in you all; whose goodness is equal to his power, and whose will is holy, just, and good.

2. *We urge it on the ground of relationship and obligation.* God is your Creator, you are his creatures; God is your Father, you are his children; God is the Sovereign, you are his subjects: submission therefore becomes you. In addition to this, you owe your all to God; your life, and clothes, and food; your personal and relative comforts all come from Him: gratitude therefore should bind you to submit to God.

3. *We urge it for the sake of your personal happiness.* Happiness supposes the removal of guilt from the conscience: submit to God' method of saving sinners, and you will be justified by faith. It supposes the regeneration of the nature; submit to the influences of the Holy Ghost, and you will be "born again of the Spirit," &c. It supposes internal tranquillity: submit to God, and you will experience 'the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind.'

4. *We urge it from a consideration of the punishment which inevitably follows the crime of non-submission to God.* There is not one truth within the whole compass of religion more incontestably proved than this, that God will punish his enemies; and a refusing to submit to God, is the surest proof of personal enmity to him. The original sin of Adam, 'that brought death into the world and all our wo,' was non-submission; and the

crime of apostate spirits was of the same description; and those who refuse to submit to God, must be punished by him, Luke xxi, 27.

The text should *suggest an inquiry*, Do we submit to God? Alas! how little submission there is to God in the world! Some violate his laws—others reject his counsel—others murmur at his providence. What is our character?—The text should *produce conviction*. We have all been found among the number of those who have neglected to submit to God; this should teach us our *folly*, our *ingratitude*, and our *danger;* and it should also excite deep remorse, genuine humility, &c. The text should *direct our conduct*. What else need we *know*, than how to submit to God? What *else* need we *do*, than practise this submission? What else need we covet to *enjoy*, than a consciousness of having submitted to God?

BETA.

XLII.—*The Prevalence of the Righteous Man's Prayer.*

JAMES v, 16.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

PRAYER is ever considered to be useless by those who lean to their own understanding; it appears to them to be perfectly ridiculous to suppose that it can be of any avail, when it has the interest of a solitary individual for its object, rather than the interests of the world. Under such circumstances, they think that neither the piety of him who offers it, nor any other thing, can make it available; and yet what sentiment is there more evidently set forth in the word of God, than the necessity and efficacy of the prayers of truly pious persons, whether those prayers be offered for the world, or only for individuals. To bring this doctrine more fully into view, let me,

I. DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE CHARACTER WHOSE PRAYERS ARE SAID TO POSSESS SUCH MIGHTY EFFICACY;—"A righteous man." Wicked men, though they never are, nor ever can be designated praying men, yet *they* sometimes pray; but their prayers are powerless. By "a righteous man," understand an elder; because those that were sick were directed

ver. 14, to send for the elders to pray with them; and in that case they had a promise of healing. Now by an elder was often meant a minister, as ministers were most frequently chosen from among the oldest, the gravest, the most experienced, and the best members of the church. These were emphatically good men, and usually men "full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost." But although this would be an important sense given to the term, I cannot think it the true one; for,

1. The directions which the apostle here gives to Christians, is, that they should "confess their faults one to another, and pray one for another, that they might be healed:" unless, therefore, we suppose, either that elders were not liable to be overtaken in a fault, or, if overtaken, not required to confess it, (neither of which, I presume, will be affirmed,) unless, I say, these things be maintained, we must suppose that elders, and others, on committing faults, were required to confess them, and to avail themselves of the prayers of their Christian brethren for their healing. This being the case, the efficacious prayer here mentioned cannot be the prayer of elders only, or even principally, but of any and of every Christian; and,

2. Unless we mean to confine righteousness to elders, or to say that righteous men in ordinary cannot offer an availing prayer, we must suppose the term, "righteous man," to mean any and every such man, and not elders only. For these reasons, I think the apostle is not here speaking of the efficacy of the prayers of elders only, but of all those who are justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus, and are made partakers of the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God. And in particular, he is speaking of the prayers of those who, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, are walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless. Now observe, the text intimates that,

II. THE PRAYERS OF SUCH MEN ARE REMARKABLE FOR THEIR FERVOUR;—"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" or, as it is phrased in the marginal reading of ver. 17, 'He prays in prayer.' His prayers contain more than the utterance of certain expressions indicative of desire, or even than the utterance of those expressions with noise and vociferation. In all his prayers his soul takes a principal share; perceiving the value of the blessings sought, the greatness of its own necessity, and the vast importance of receiving its desires, it is, as it were, wrought up into an agony. I do not say that such a man never feels any barrenness of spirit, any backward-

ness to duty, any discouragement, or any unbelief, when he should engage in prayer; but I dare affirm, that he does not restrain prayer before God on these accounts, nor will he ever give up, with his own will, until his prayer has pierced the heavens, and wrought its way to the throne of God. Like Jacob, he will wrestle until he obtain the blessing, Gen. xxxii, 24—28. Like Elijah, 1 Kings xviii, 42, he will cast himself to the earth, and put his face between his knees, and plead with his God. Or, like the importunate widow, Luke xviii, 2—7, he will be continually coming until his suit be gained. Such will be the conduct of a righteous man in ordinary cases; but, on some special occasions, he will be more fervent: and when but one pious individual is thus inspired and wrought up in prayer, can he pray in vain? But if more than one, and especially if many such, should be agreed and inspired in supplications, must not their prayers be most triumphant in operation? For observe,

III. THE TEXT DOES NOT REPRESENT THE PRAYERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AS MORE REMARKABLE FOR THEIR FERVOUR THAN SUCCESS. They avail much. With whom do they thus avail? Doubtless with Him who is the only object of the righteous man's prayer. How remarkable is Jehovah's language to Jacob, when he wrestled with his Lord! "Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Here you see his prayer had a princely effect: and had not Moses' prayer a similar effect? Num. xiv, 11—20. Some consider the text as referring to the exercise of a supernatural or miraculous gift in prayer, and hence the efficacy attributed to it; Elijah shut and opened heaven, say they, which was a miracle. I am not satisfied that any such gift ever existed in the church; and if it had, such a gift would never have been employed but for the production of miraculous effects. And is it not a matter of fact, that many prayers which were not offered up with the faith of miracles, were miraculously answered? Such was Jacob's prayer, to which we have already alluded; Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple; Hezekiah's, at Sennacherib's invasion of his kingdom; the prayer of Cornelius; and the church in behalf of Peter. Now if faith, not miraculous, though eminent, has so often been followed by miraculous effects, surely we shall not be thought extravagant in contending that such faith will produce ordinary effects. In an old version of the Bible, the rendering of this passage is, "*The prayer of the righteous man availeth much, if it be fervent.*" Nor can the want of elegance in its composition, or of the graces of delivery, or of

any other commendatory circumstance with men, hinder its efficacy; neither can their presence farther it one jot or tittle.

From this subject learn,

1. The great encouragement which righteous people have to pray, since their prayers have such power with the Most High.

2. The vast importance of piety, seeing that it, and it alone, can render our prayers available.

IOTA.

XLIII.—*The pious Sufferer exhorted to glorify God.*

1 PETER iv, 16.

"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

IN the latter part of the first age, the rage of Jews and Gentiles was exceedingly stimulated by the prevalence of the gospel; the apostles, therefore, considered themselves as especially called to comfort and encourage their suffering brethren. With this view, Peter reminded the disciples of Christ of the obligations they were under to suffer for their religion, and suggested a variety of motives to persuade them to do it cheerfully. See context; also chap. iii, 14—18. We are not in similar circumstances with the first Christians; hence, the danger of our religion being superficial; yet, if any man's piety and decision of character subject him to suffering, "let him not be ashamed." We may therefore state,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN.

II. WHY CHARACTERS WHO THUS SUFFER SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED.

III. THEIR DUTY UNDER SUFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES.

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED, &c. The term Christian was given to the disciples of Christ first at Antioch, and is used in three places only in the New Testament, viz. here; in Acts xi, 26; and xxvi, 28. It imports nothing less than an experimental and practical believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. To suffer as a Christian, is,

1. *To suffer in the character of a Christian.* Where piety has its seat in the heart, it will appear in the life; hence believers are the salt of the earth, to spread a salutary influence

and save the world from moral putrefaction:—the light of the world; as such they are to shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day;—a city set on a hill, to be seen and identified by all, Matt. v, 13—16. It was never the design of the Head of the church that any of its members should seclude themselves from society, John xvii, 15. It is the duty of all who believe in Christ to confess him before men, Matt. x, 32, 33; and to conceal our religion is a tacit denial of Christ, and opposed to the doctrine of our text.

2. *To suffer for discharging the duties of a Christian.* Christianity frees its possessors from the slavery of custom; they are governed by the high principles of religion. In the service of God, like Joshua, xxiv, 15, and Daniel, vi, 10, they are undaunted. Whatever is the opinion of the world, the work of God is to them of paramount importance. In domestic life, they are faithful, conscientious, and obliging; as religious characters, they are fixed in their views, and bold in their profession; in the civil world, they are true and just in all their dealings, embodying principle and conscience in each action; while, as subjects of the realm, they are peaceable and quiet. If, therefore, such a conduct subject them to suffering, "let them not be ashamed."

3. *To suffer in the spirit of a Christian.* If human enemies rise against you, think it not strange, but "in patience possess ye your souls," Luke xxi, 19. Should their unkindness and sin lead to an unjust impeachment of your character, the injury of your person or circumstances, suffer not the spirit of revenge to betray you into sin. "Recompense no man evil for evil," Rom. xii, 17; but, if it be possible, "live peaceably with all men," ver. 18; and "if thine enemy hunger, feed him," ver. 20, 21. Like your Lord, be ready to forgive, and show that you have added to your courage, patience, &c, 2 Pet. i, 5—7. Let not persecution, either in its mild or terrific forms, intimidate you; remember him, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again," &c, 1 Pet. ii, 23; take also for your example the apostles of our Lord, who would say, "Being reviled, we bless," &c, 1 Cor. xii, 13. Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Phil. ii, 5. Let us therefore consider,

II. WHY CHARACTERS WHO THUS SUFFER SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED.

1. *Because they suffer innocently.* "If any man suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other men's matters," he has cause to be ashamed; but if inno-

cent, his record is with God, and he partakes of that satisfaction which is the good man's inheritance, Prov. xiv, 14. Let the craft and subtlety of the devil and man be directed against you, the shield of innocence will repel every dart. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake," &c, Matthew v, 10—12.

2. *They suffer in a good cause.* Not like the man whom justice has arrested for dishonesty—the law condemned for perjury, or sentenced to death for murder; theirs is the cause of truth, justice, mercy, benevolence, and piety. Their business is to get good, and do good—to injure no one by word or deed; and while their motto is "Holiness to the Lord," and in all things seek to glorify him who has bought them with his blood, they should not be ashamed.

3. *They suffer from the purest motive.* Their conscientious exactness is not the result of fostered peculiarity, or with a view to be singular. God is their witness, that with sincerity and simplicity they wish to walk before him. His will is their law—his glory their end; and they esteem the approbation of God more than any thing this world can afford.

4. *They suffer for a blessed Master.* He is a high Priest who is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, Heb. iv, 15; and what they suffer for him, though painful, will conduce to their good, Rom. viii, 28; 2 Cor. iv, 16—18. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," &c, ver. 12, 13; "for unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. i, 29; "and if we suffer, we shall also reign with him," 2 Tim. ii, 12.

5. *They suffer in imitation of the brightest examples.* Look at the catalogue of patriarchs, kings, priests, and prophets, Heb. xi, whose intrepidity, faith, patience, and purity, they follow. They have a noble army of martyrs before their eyes: and as their great example, a suffering Saviour, Heb. xii, 1—3. Let us therefore consider,

III. THEIR DUTY UNDER SUFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES; viz. to "glorify God on this behalf." We are not, however, to suppose that man can add any thing to the essential glory of God, but they are to glorify God by,

1. *Devoutly acknowledging Him and his gifts*, 1 Chronicles xxix, 11, 12; confessing him "worthy to receive honour, glory, might, and majesty," Rev. iv, 11. The very circumstance of their suffering should prompt them to this.

2. *By firmness in the day of trial.* Let them consider Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and not be discouraged; let nothing shake their firmness, 1 Cor. xv, 58; but imitate the example of the disciples, who continued with their Lord in his temptations, Luke xxii, 28, 29. When the service of God demands their attention, let not secondary considerations discourage them. He who, for fear of persecution, or for the sake of his temporal interest, abandons religion, shall lose his soul; and he who, in the time of persecution, abjures the religion of Christ, is not only in danger of losing his soul, but his life, Matt. x, 39; "He that findeth his life, shall lose it." That was literally fulfilled in Archbishop Cranmer, who, for confessing Christ against the devil and the pope, was ordered to be burnt: to save his life, he recanted, and was, notwithstanding, burnt. In the service of God we must persevere, fearless of consequences. Honour God, and God will honour you, 1 Sam. ii, 30.

3. *By a faithful and patient endurance of suffering.* Should conflicts increase, friends forsake, and enemies combine against you, "rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings," &c, ver. 13. Think it not strange if an ungodly world should hate you, John xv, 18. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii, 12; therefore, "in your patience, possess your souls," Luke xxi, 19. "Let patience have her perfect work," James i, 4; and glorify God in the exercise of that grace which his own hand has planted, and which his providence has suffered to be exercised.

To this act of glorifying God, they are encouraged from,

1. *The declarations and promises he has made.* These are many, great, and various, Isaiah xli, 10, xliii, 1, 2, liv, 17; Matt. x, 32; James i, 12; Rev. ii, 10, xxii, 7.

2. *The honour it will confer upon them.* Let the warrior wave his blood-stained laurel, boast of the immensity of his possessions, purchased by the gore of his fellow men, and spread his fame from pole to pole;—a nobler award awaits *them;* their names shall continue when the annals of history are destroyed —their inheritance will not fade away—their memorial will endure for ever, 1 Pet. i, 3—5; Psa. cxii, 6.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *Let us examine our experience by this test.* Do I believe in, and love the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I modestly, yet boldly, confessing him before the world? Can I patiently and cheerfully suffer for his sake?

2. *Let us encourage ourselves in the Lord.* In such a cause, for such a Master, with such promises, and in the strength of grace, let us pursue our course. Victory, rest, and glory, are before us.

3. *Let us pray for our persecutors.* Their state is awful—it is dangerous. May the Lord our God grant them repentance unto life!

KAPPA.

XLIV.—*Christian Diligence, with its Motives and End.*

2 PETER iii, 14.

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

WHEN St. Peter wrote this epistle to the Christians of his day, he appeared to have a presentiment of his approaching end; chap. i, ver. 14. His mind was therefore deeply affected with such sentiments as death, and judgment, and eternity, are calculated to produce; and being earnestly desirous that his suffering companions might, after his decease, have these things always in remembrance, he lays before them such statements concerning them as the Spirit of God inspired. The text may be regarded as an inference drawn from these awfully sublime subjects;—"Wherefore, beloved," &c. We notice here,

I. PERSONS ADDRESSED;—"Wherefore, beloved," &c. That the individuals who were designated as "beloved," were real Christians, may be fairly proved from the preceding parts of the epistle. They had obtained precious faith—they had escaped the corruption of the world—they were the subjects of great and precious promises—and they were partakers of the divine nature. As such, they were,

1. *Beloved of God.* That the people of God are beloved by him, we infer from the titles by which he distinguishes them—the precious things to which he compares them—the union he forms with them—the care he takes of them—and the heaven he prepares for them: and we prove it from such texts as the following:—Deut. xxxiii, 12; Neh. xiii, 26; Dan. ix, 23; Mal. iii, 17; Rom. ix, 25.

2. *Beloved of each other.* Christians love one another. The precepts of the New Testament enjoin this; the likeness they bear to each other induces this; and the experience of the primitive believers proves it.

II. EVENTS ANTICIPATED;—"Ye look for such things." The things to which the apostle alludes, can only be understood by referring to the preceding parts of the chapter. From these we understand that Christians anticipate,

1. *A general judgment.* This is called "The day of judgment," ver. 7; "the day of the Lord," ver. 10; and "the day of God," ver. 12. Reason dictates the propriety of such a day; and Scripture proves its certainty. This judgment will be *universal;* all must appear, 2 Cor. v, 10;—*particular;* works will be judged, Eccles. xii, 14,—words will be judged, Matt. xii, 36,—thoughts will be judged, Rom. ii, 16;—*impartial;* there will be no bribes to bias the Judge—no defective evidence, or false depositions—no unjust sentence;—*final;* no appeal to a higher court—all must submit to the sentence.

2. *A general conflagration;*—"The heavens and the earth are reserved unto fire," &c, ver. 7; "The heavens shall pass away," &c, ver. 10; "The heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved," &c, ver. 12. This conflagration is frequently referred to in the Bible, Psa. l, 3; 2 Thess. i, 7, 8; Rev. xx, 11—13. Various conjectures have been afloat as to the means by which this amazing change shall take place. Whiston supposed that a comet would produce it, by drawing the earth into the sun. Dr. Thomas Burnet imagined that many natural causes would conspire to bring it about; that many dry summers would render the earth combustible in a high degree; that volcanoes would burst forth in many places, &c. Such are the sentiments of the poet:—

> 'See, all the formidable sons of fire,
> Eruptions, earthquakes, comets, lightnings play
> Their various engines; all at once disgorge
> Their blazing magazines, and take by storm
> This poor terrestrial citadel of man.'

3. *A general renovation of all things;*—or, as the apostle expresses it, "A new heaven, and a new earth," &c, ver. 13. Christians anticipate this, because God has promised it;—"Behold, I create new heavens," &c, Isa. lxv, 17: "The new heavens and the new earth," &c, Isa. lxvi, 22. John had a visionary representation of this, Rev. xxi, 1. How far these remarks

are to be understood literally, we dare not affirm. We know that a curse is entailed on the earth, in consequence of sin; and not on the earth only, but even on the elements by which it is surrounded: that God will purge away this curse, and a general renovation will take place; the conflagration will not annihilate the earth, but act on it as a refining fire.

4. *A general state of rewards and punishments.* The Scriptures invariably attest the truth of this. It harmonizes with our ideas of the justice and goodness of God, and it is a matter of almost universal belief.

III. A CHARGE GIVEN;—"Be diligent." Diligence is opposed to idleness, slothfulness, or inattention; it implies,

1. *An object to be secured.* There can be no diligence without an object to which it is directed. Men have various objects to which their time, attention, and energies are applied. That on which the Christian's eye is fixed is of high importance, and universal interest: objects of inferior consequence cannot merit diligence:—'A soul immortal spending all her fires,' &c.*

2. *An acquaintance with that object.* However important an object may be, there can be no diligence used in reference to that object, without some previous acquaintance with it. If a man's house be on fire about him, and he be ignorant of it, by being asleep, or in a state of intoxication, he will use no efforts to escape the danger. Men are unacquainted with the great objects to which their diligence should be applied. How little do they know of God, whose eternal glory should be their constant aim! How little of the value of their souls, for whose salvation they should be continually engaged!

3. *Means used to ensure its possession.* God has given us means in rich abundance:—these should be used *frequently*, with *devout* and *earnest* expectation, and with *constant* reference to eternity.

IV. AN END PROPOSED;—"That ye may be found of him in peace," &c.

1. *Peace is opposed to war, and implies a state of reconciliation.* Men are in a state of hostility with God, but means are used to effect a reconciliation. Diligence produces this.

2. *Peace is opposed to perturbation and inward disquietude, and signifies tranquillity.* The scenes of the day of judgment will excite horror and despair in the minds of the ungodly; but those who give diligence to make their calling and election sure, will 'smile to see a burning world.'

* See Young's Night Thoughts.

3. *Without spot and blameless;* purified from moral pollution, and "without fault before the throne of God."

LEARN,

1. What awful scenes we shall ere long behold.
2. The great importance of Christian diligence.
3. What an intimate relation subsists between the means and the end.
4. The happiness of those who will be found in peace, without spot, and blameless.

BETA.

XLV.—*Walking in Truth.*

3 JOHN 4.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

MINISTERS of our Lord Jesus Christ are appointed to watch over the souls of men; and the great day is fast approaching, when they must give an account of the charge committed to their care, Heb. xiii, 7. The apostles of our Lord excelled in the discharge of this duty; and those who are called to the same work, should copy after their example: then, being influenced by the apostolic spirit, they will rejoice *greatly*, like the beloved John, when their children enjoy spiritual health, and walk in truth. The joys of the apostle, both as a Christian and a minister, were many and great; but he asserts, in our text, that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth.

I. THE CHILDREN OF THE APOSTLE JOHN WALKED IN TRUTH. His children were real Christians, both in heart and life; and all such walk in truth. But, as Pilate said to Jesus, "What is truth?"

1. *Truth refers to our thoughts, words, and actions.* Our thoughts are true, when we think of things as they are; our words are true, when we speak as we think; and our actions are true, when they are conformable to the Holy Scriptures; for then we "obey the truth," Rom. ii, 8. That we may *think* correctly, let us examine things carefully, 1 Thess. v, 21; that we may *speak* exactly, let us keep the door of our lips, Psa. cxli, 3; and that we may *act* the truth, let us live as in the immediate presence of the Lord, Psa. xvi, 8.

2. *The word of God, including both the Old Testament and the New, is a revelation of the truth.* That blessed book is the only infallible rule of faith and practice: but the word *truth*, in our text, may particularly refer to the gospel of God our Saviour, which, as a system of truth, is the perfection of all previous revelations, Gal. iii, 1. 'The New Testament,' says Locke, 'has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.'

3. *Jesus Christ, our Divine Teacher, is called the Truth.* In his humble birth, holy life, painful death, blessed resurrection, and glorious ascension, all the promises, prophecies, and types of the Old Testament, relating to the Messiah, were *fully verified;* and while he dwelt on earth, he taught the truth of God in all its beauty and fulness. We read Socrates, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, and other eminently learned men, with caution, because there is a mixture of truth and error in all their works; but when we read the discourses of our adorable Saviour, we feel confidence and assurance, because he knew all things, and taught the way of God in truth, Matt. xxii, 16.

4. *To walk in truth, implies a strict conformity to its sacred dictates, in our experience, and in all our works and ways.* Here it may be observed, that God has not revealed truth merely to amuse us, or to satisfy our curiosity, but with a view to practical purposes; that it is one thing to believe and profess truth, and another to walk in it, Rom. i, 18; that faith and practice, so often *separated*, should be constantly *united;* and, finally, that he walks in truth, in every point of view, who has an enlightened understanding, a renewed heart, an edifying conversation, and a holy conduct, Isa. ii, 5; Psa. ci, 2; Eph. iv, 29; Rom. vi, 4.

5. *Those who walk in truth should be careful to hold it fast.* Solomon says, "Buy the truth, and sell it not," Prov. xxiii, 23. Rather part with wealth, fame, and even life, than truth. Be valiant for it, Jer. ix, 3; let your loins be girt with truth, Eph. vi, 14; be established in the truth, 2 Pet. i, 12; do nothing against the truth, 2 Cor. xiii, 8. That you may hold it fast, carefully recollect that it makes you *free*, John viii, 32; and that you are sanctified and purified through the truth, John xvii, 17; 1 Pet. i, 22.

6. *We should examine ourselves daily, whether we be in the truth, and how it affects our life and conversation.* Our knowledge is limited, and ever will be so: but are our views, as far as they extend, agreeable to truth? Is our experience in unison

with the revealed truth of the written word? Are we advancing in sound and true experience? Is our conduct, in all things, consistent with truth? These inquiries, by the blessing of God, will promote our *love* of truth, and lead us to *honour* and obey it in all its requirements.

II. JOHN HAD NO GREATER JOY THAN TO HEAR OF HIS CHILDREN WALKING IN TRUTH.

1. *Joy implies gladness and exultation, either in the possession or prospect of something which we deem good and excellent.* It is a lovely passion in a pious person; it exhilarates the spirits, even in afflictive and trying circumstances, 1 Cor. vi, 10; and produces a flowing tide of the most pleasurable feelings. No matter what our external circumstances may be; for, if we have religious joy in our hearts, we are substantially happy, and, like Paul and Silas, can praise God at midnight, in a prison, though loaded with chains, Acts xvi, 25.

2. *Men of the world, who mind only earthly things, feel joy and gladness in the things of time and sense.* They are joyful and glad when their corn and their wine are increased, Psa. iv, 7; they joy in their own labour, and in their carnal pleasures, Eccl. ii, 10; they joy even in their vile hypocrisy and artful deceptions, Job xx, 5; yea, "folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom," Prov. xv, 21. But this joy, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, is but a sudden blaze, which is soon extinguished, Eccles. vii, 6. The *unsanctified* joy of Haman was of short duration; and that which made his heart glad, led him to a gallows, Esther v, 9, vii, 10.

3. *But pious men joy in spiritual and eternal blessings*, more than in *the good things of this life, which are passing away.* The blessed operations of the Holy Ghost in their hearts are abundant sources of pure joy, Rom. xiv, 17; they joy in the God of their salvation, Heb. iii, 18; they receive the word with joy, 1 Thess. i, 6; they count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations or trials, James i, 2; and their joy is unspeakable and full of glory, 1 Pet. i, 8. It is similar to the joys of the blessed in heaven, and a sweet anticipation of eternal bliss: it is intended to comfort and cheer the hearts of the pious in this world of sin and sorrow; and, being furnished with matter of joy in every state, they are commanded to rejoice evermore, and in every thing to give thanks, 1 Thess. v, 16, 18.

4. *Ministers of the gospel joy in the followers of Jesus, and especially in those whom they have been instrumental in turning to the Lord.* The apostle Paul expresses his *feelings* on this subject in the following words: "Ye are our joy and glory,"

1 Thess. ii, 20. Under the influence of human weakness, a minister may feel joy when the people praise his sermons, and extol his gifts; but, in his best moments, nothing affords him so much joy as the success of his labours, in the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints. He rejoices in the prosperity of believers, as a parent rejoices in the prosperity of his children; for they are his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing, 1 Thessalonians, ii, 19.

5. *It is certain that the beloved John, whose piety far exceeded that of most men, had many pure and exalted joys.* Among these we may notice—his union with Christ—his high and holy calling, as an apostle of our Lord—his fellowship with the church—his spirituality and heavenly-mindedness—reflections on his personal acquaintance with Jesus, and the distinguishing marks of his Master's love to him—and his prospects of a happy and glorious immortality. Inspired with these joys, and allowing that he had no other, he was happier far than the most elevated of those mortals whose only portion was in the present world; and in such a frame of mind as those joys produced, might look down on all the mighty sons of earth with pity and compassion.

6. *But he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth.* He does not say he had no joy *equal* to that, but he had none which was *greater*. But why did he rejoice so greatly in the consistent character and conduct of his children? The following reasons may be assigned:—*God* was *glorified* in their fruit, John xv, 8;—the *truth* was *exalted* and *acknowledged* before men, Tit. i, 1;—the *ministry* was *honoured*, 2 Thess. iii, 1;—they were *happy* in a consistent conduct, Rev. xxii, 14;—they were *useful* in the world, Rom. ii, 10;—and John had the pleasing prospect of their being his *confidence* at the coming of the Lord, 1 John ii, 28. Baxter observes that 'true ministers rejoice more for the welfare of men's souls, than in their procuring wealth and worldly honours.'

7. *The joyous feelings of the holy apostle would carry him forward in his great work with increasing ardour.* The world, the devil, and sin, oppose every faithful minister; but he fights the good fight, and gains the victory, 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8. Bonds and afflictions abide by him; but he is not moved; he rejoices in his work, and counts not his life dear unto him, that he may finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he has received of the Lord Jesus, Acts xx, 23, 24. Such was the experience of the apostle Paul, such was the experience of John the Divine, and may this be the happy experience of every Christian minister.

3. *Happy are the people who are favoured with a minister, whose greatest joy is their prosperity in pure religion.* Their best interests lie near his heart; he carefully teaches them the truth; he constantly remembers them in his prayers; he visits them in their afflictions; he sets them a good example; and watches over them in the Lord with constant care. Such ministers are worthy of double honour, 1 Tim. v, 17; and whatever treatment they meet with among men, they will be highly honoured in the day of judgment.

SIGMA.

XLVI.—*Christians required to contend for the Faith.*

JUDE 3.

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

THIS epistle was written by Jude, "a servant of Jesus Christ," in the gospel ministry, to them who were "sanctified," or separated from an idolatrous world "by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ," from dangerous errors and wicked practices; and who were "called" to embrace the doctrines, engage in the duties, and share the privileges of genuine Christianity: and he devoutly prays that mercy, peace, and love, might be multiplied unto them. They were beloved by him, as all true believers should be by Christian ministers; and under the influence of Divine inspiration, he gave all diligence to write unto them on that salvation which is common to all who believe, whether they be Jews or Gentiles; but found it particularly needful to exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints; because many seducing teachers had crept in among them unawares.

I. WHAT IS THAT FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS?

1. *It is not a set of mere notions and opinions, founded on human reason, and supported by powers of oratory.* The heathen philosophers were famous for speculative notions, but were strangers to the truth as it is in Jesus. They had vast stores of human learning, but were ignorant of the God who gave them

being: and all men, however learned, who are in a state of nature, are ignorant of their Maker; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them," 1 Cor. ii, 14.

2. *The faith of a Christian implies, either that act of his mind, by which he gives credence to revealed truth; or, by a usual metonymy, the objects of his faith, including all the doctrines of Christianity.* The credence which he gives is founded on satisfactory evidence. He has examined the *character* of Christ and his apostles, and finds they were worthy of credit; he has examined the *doctrines* which they taught, and finds them worthy of God; he has examined the miracles which they wrought in open day, and before multitudes of witnesses, as proofs of their mission from God, and finds them to be *real* and highly important facts; and he has examined the prophecies which they delivered, and finds them exact predictions of future events. On these, and other important grounds, he gives full credit to all the truths which they taught. The principal doctrines which he believes may be summed up in a few articles: such as, the being and perfections of God, Matt. v, 48; the government of the world by divine providence, Matt. x, 29, 30; the original purity and happiness of man, Gen. i, 27; his awful apostasy from God, 1 John v, 19; the atonement of Jesus Christ, 1 John ii, 2; the influences of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men, Gal. v, 22, 23; justification by faith, Rom. v, 1; the necessity of inward and outward holiness, 1 Thess. v, 23; a resurrection from the dead, John v, 28, 29; a day of judgment, Acts xvii, 31; and eternal rewards and punishments, Matthew xxv, 46.

3. *This faith was once delivered to the saints.* It was delivered in *part* by the Jewish prophets; but *fully* by Christ and his apostles, Heb. i, 1, ii, 3, 4. It was delivered to holy persons, not only to illuminate their own understandings, but that they might communicate it to others, and thereby enlighten the nations which were in darkness and in death, Matt. v, 15.

4. *Besides this faith or belief of truth, there is a living and working faith, which has been delivered by Christ and his apostles, as a term or condition of salvation.* This faith implies a *knowledge* of Jesus in his mediatorial undertakings; an humble *dependance* on him as our atoning sacrifice; and a receiving of him in all his sacred offices and characters, Mark xvi, 15; John i, 12; Rom. x, 10. Faith in the *doctrines* of Christianity precedes *saving* faith; but he who believes the truth, without

being influenced by it both in heart and life, has only a dead faith, James ii, 26; while he whose faith is active and operative, is brought into spiritual life and divine love, Gal. ii, 20, v, 6; and thus faith purifies the heart, Acts xv, 9.

II. How should the saints contend for faith?—

1. *The faith of a Christian is worth contending for, being of great value, and of vast importance to man.* It brings him out of darkness into light; teaches him the knowledge of himself and of God his Saviour; and opens to his view a blessed and glorious immortality, 2 Tim. i, 10. Without this faith we should be buried in gross ignorance, frightful superstitions, and destructive delusions.

2. *The Christian faith has many opposers, and we must prepare to meet them in the field of battle.* This faith is opposed by Jews, Infidels, Mohammedans, and Heathens. Let us defend it by sound arguments, drawn from the written word. This is our weapon, and when skilfully used, will either convince our enemies, or put them to flight. They will not easily yield to logic, metaphysics, or oratory; but the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, will carry all before it, Eph. vi, 17.

3. *Contend earnestly for the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is placed in your hands as a sacred deposit, to be preserved in its purity.* Some who contend for the faith *ex officio*, neither seem to believe it themselves, nor to wish others to believe. To them the doctrines of the cross have no charms; they are lovers of filthy lucre, and would surrender the faith for wealth and honour. But when we consider that the present happiness of men, and their future prospects, depend on their receiving and holding fast the truth, we are awakened to a holy *zeal*, and contend for the faith with a sacred *ardour*.

4. *But though we contend with earnestness, let us carefully avoid carnal weapons and angry passions.* Mohammed contended for *his* faith with the sword; the Roman Catholics have contended for *their* faith by racks and tortures; but the real Christian, in a spirit of meekness, contends not with carnal weapons, but those which are mighty, 2 Cor. x, 4. He uses sound words and potent arguments, and is able "both to exhort and convince gainsayers," Tit. i, 9.

5. *Never contend merely for the sake of victory, but with a view to do good.* He who aims at nothing but victory, is proud and vain; and would undertake to defend either truth or error, for the sake of a triumph. The man of God has better motives and ends in all his contentions; he constantly aims at the good

of men and the glory of God; and when these objects are not likely to be promoted, he retires and mourns in secret. The apostle Paul was set for the defence of the gospel, Phil. i, 17; and it is very observable, that when he was brought before kings and great men, his only object was to prove the truth, and win them over to the cause of Christ, Acts xxvi, 28, 29.

6. *Beware of little petty controversies about either nonessential things, or things beyond the reach of human intellect.* Many questions, which have agitated the Church in all ages, have been foolish and trifling; and others have been profoundly deep and unfathomable. When we contend for that which is important and within our reach, we keep in the line of duty; but when we engage in disputes on fanciful and deeply mysterious things, we miss our way, and injure the cause which we profess to support. Such were the vain janglings which the apostle Paul condemned, 1 Tim. i, 3—7.

To conclude:—

Let us be thankful to God for his holy word, which is an infallible rule both of *faith* and *practice;* let us believe what he has revealed, though we cannot in every instance understand the mysteries of our faith; let us seek no new doctrine, but carefully study that which has been delivered to the saints; let us arm our minds with *plain* and *solid* arguments, to defend this faith against the subtle and malicious attacks of infidels and heretics; let us bend all our force in support of *vital* truths; let us transmit our faith, in its purity and simplicity, to the rising generation; and, above all, let us contend for that faith which unites the soul to Christ, and which is "the *substance* of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi, 1.

SIGMA.

XLVII.—*Gracious counsel to a fallen Church.*

REVELATON iii, 17, 18.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see."

PROFESSORS of religion should endeavour to acquire correct views of themselves; then they will neither boast of their attainments, nor presumptuously depend upon imaginary possessions. The members of the Laodicean church, being ignorant of themselves, *said* they were rich, and increased with goods, and that they had need of nothing; but, in *reality*, they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Yet our Lord, in tender mercy, counselled them to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they might be rich; and white raiment, that they might be clothed: and eye salve, that they might see. This reminds us of Jehovah's compassion to backsliding Israel, when he said, with the tenderness of a father, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" Hos. xi, 8.

I. CONSIDER THE IMAGINARY STATE OE THE LAODICEAN CHURCH.

1. *The angel or minister is addressed, but the people also are intended.* It is well known that αγγελος, angel, is not a name of nature, but of office; and that it signifies a messenger. The angel, or minister, was the messenger of God to the people, when he preached the word of life; and he was the messenger of the people to God, when he offered up their prayers, and addressed him in their name. He is here addressed, because he was placed over the church as a guide and a governor; and, probably, because his state resembled that of the people under his care. But how awful is the state of a professing church, when both minister and people are sunk into a state of lukewarmness.

2. *They imagined themselves to be both wealthy and independent.* "Thou sayest, I am rich," in gifts and graces, in knowledge and holiness; "and increased with goods," including both worldly possessions, and spiritual treasures; "and have need

of nothing," either from God or man:—they were proud, vain, and self-sufficient. And has not this been the case with other churches, when outward prosperity has led them to careless formality? Here it may be proper to trace this state of mind up to its source; it begins generally in outward prosperity; that opens the way to sensual enjoyments, dress, and carnal company; then follow human praise and fulsome flattery; flattery produces pride and vanity; and pride and vanity produce boasting, self-confidence, and contempt of others.

3. *Those persons who, like the Laodiceans, praise themselves, are always to be suspected.* It is an old and true saying, that 'self-praise is no commendation;' and every one will allow that *boasting* is *hateful* both to God and men. Therefore, whatever the Laodiceans said of themselves, in that way, rendered them more odious, and amounted to nothing. An humble man dare not praise himself; he leaves that work to others, Prov. xxvii, 2. The apostles of our Lord durst not boast either of their gifts or graces, 2 Cor. x, 12; and boasters have always been the most worthless of men: instance *Nebuchadnezzar*, Dan. iv, 30; and *Theudas*, Acts iv, 36: the heathen in their worst state, are called boasters, Rom. i, 30; and it is predicted of corrupt professing Christians, that they would be boasters, 2 Tim. iii, 2.

4. *Awful effects follow boasting and self-sufficiency.* A boaster *feeds* his own *pride* and *vanity;* he who has no need of *any thing*, will ask for *nothing;* and thus *prayer* is laid *aside* as a useless thing. On this plan, God is robbed of that praise which is due to his holy name; for who that praises himself, will praise the Lord? When we are confirmed in this dreadful state, sin predominates; our graces wither, fade, and die; the Spirit of God is quenched; and strong delusions are judicially sent, by an offended God, that we may believe a lie and be damned, 2 Thess. ii, 11, 12.

II. POINT OUT THE REAL STATE OF THAT CHURCH.

1. *With all their boasting they were in a wretched state.* In the eyes of Jesus, their Judge, they were worthless and truly despicable; and this is the case with all empty proud professors. Of all men in the world, backsliders are the most wretched; the crown is fallen from their head; they are mean and contemptible, because they have sinned, Lam. iv, 16.

2. *Like other sinners they were miserable.* Men who are destitute of religion, have no solid enjoyments; like Ephraim, they feed on the wind, and follow after the east wind, Hosea xii, 1; and they are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest,

Isa. lvii, 20: they are miserable in life, and will be miserable in death, James v, 1; yea, they will be miserable in the eternal world, Matt. xxi, 41.

3. *While boasting of riches they were poor.* The wealth of this world does not make a man rich before God; and the unholy have neither any valuable possessions of grace here, nor any title or claim to glory hereafter. Some are rich in faith, James ii, 5; and others in good works, 1 Tim. vi, 18; but they have neither the one nor the other; nor have they any treasure laid up in heaven, the place where the riches of a good man are deposited, Matt. vi, 20.

4. *They were blind in spiritual things.* Blindness denotes ignorance, Rom. x, 25. Fallen professors do not see their sins; they do not see the state they are in before God; they do not see the ruin which is coming upon them, 1 Thess. v, 2. Their former experience is nearly erased from their memory, for they have forgotten that they were once purged from their old sins, 2 Pet. i, 9.

5. *And they were naked before him, whose eyes see things as they are.* The people of God are clothed with the garment of salvation, and covered with the robe of righteousness, Isaiah lxi, 10; but wicked men are guilty of shameful actions, and wholly destitute of every thing which is calculated to adorn the human character. To be naked signifies to be stripped of innocency: thus Adam, when he sinned, was naked, Gen. iii, 20; and when Israel sinned in worshipping the golden calf, it is said, "the people were naked," Exod, xxxii, 25.

III. STATE THE GRACIOUS COUNSEL OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

1. *Our blessed Lord gave them good counsel.* He was able to give them good counsel, for in him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii, 3. But how mild and gentle, how good and gracious, are his words!

2. *He advised them to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they might be rich.* But how were they to buy? We reply, in the language of the prophet, "without money, and without price," Isa. lv, 1. By "gold tried in the fire," we may understand the true riches; spiritual and heavenly graces; and especially the faith which worketh by love, 1 Pet. i, 7. He is rich indeed who has this faith; for all things are his, "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, 1 Cor. iii, 21, 22.

3. *And white raiment, that the shame of their nakedness might*

not appear. This raiment implies Christian virtues, a holy life, or the righteousness of the saints, Rev. xix, 1; but let us not forget that Christ is made righteousness unto us, 1 Cor. i, 30. Sin is the shame of our nakedness, it is our only disgrace; but when our Lord makes us unblameable in holiness, it no longer appears either in our words or works, 1 Thess. iii, 13.

4. *Jesus recommends them to anoint their eyes with eye salve, that they might see.* This eye salve implies the divine illuminations of the *written word*, the teachings of the *Holy Spirit*, and the instructions of the *Christian ministry;* and when the sight of man is cleared by these invaluable helps, he sees the truth as it is in Jesus, Psalm cxix, 105; 1 John ii, 20; Eph. iv, 21. He sees his real state—the remedy provided for him in Christ—and the duties and privileges of pure and undefiled religion. He was in darkness, but is now in the light of the Lord; and now it is his principal care to walk as a child of the light, Eph. v, 2.

To conclude:—

We learn, by this passage, that those who fall into the most awful and degraded state may be recovered by Christ; but then, they must believe his word, and follow his counsel. It will be found in the end, that those who reject the counsel of divine wisdom, shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices, Prov. i, 24—31.

SIGMA.

XLVIII.—*The Blessedness of the Dead who die in the Lord.*

REVELATION XIV, 13.

"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

MANY followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, who are now in glory, have been violently persecuted, by unbelieving Jews, by cruel Heathens, and by nominal Christians; but they were supported by the mighty arm of God, and were delivered from all their afflictions, Psa. xxxiv, 19. Death, their last enemy, was a welcome messenger to them; but his dark and gloomy

shades were but a short passage to the regions of light and joy. Suffering times are referred to in the words of our text; but all who die in the Lord, even by the hand of violence, are safe and happy: yet we are not to confine this portion of Scripture to martyrs, who go to their reward from deep dungeons, tormenting racks, or burning piles; it belongs to all, of every age and nation, who die in the Lord. Believers in Christ, of every name, rest from their labours, and are followed by their works, when they depart out of time into eternity. May the following observations on this fine passage be made a blessing to us all.

I. THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MUST DIE.

1. *Christian believers are saved, by the grace of God, from the guilt and power of sin; but the original sentence of death still remains in full force.* The mediation of Jesus was never intended to save man from temporal death; hence all have died, from the beginning until now, except Enoch and Elijah, Gen. v, 24; 2 Kings ii, 11; and all will continue to die, to the end of time, except those pious believers who may be found on earth when the Lord shall descend from heaven to judge the nations, 1 Thess. v, 16.

2. *Our blessed Saviour, who is the Author and Giver of life, passed through the shades of death to his own dominions in the eternal world.* Behold the Prince of Glory on the cross! There he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. He died once; and "it is appointed unto us once to die," Heb. ix, 27; but *when*, or *where*, or *how* we may die, is a secret which infinite Wisdom has not revealed. The event is certain, but the circumstances which may attend it are unknown to us.

3. *Then let us be conversant with death and the grave.* They are solemn subjects, and deeply concern us; but if we view them by day, with the eye of pious contemplation, they will prove exceedingly useful to us: our affections, by this means, will be weaned from the present world, and raised to things above, Col. iii, 2; and we shall rejoice in hope of a final conquest over the king of terrors, 1 Cor. xv, 57.

II. THEY DIE IN THE LORD.

1. *Real Christians are united to Jesus Christ by a true and living faith.* This union is *vital*, Gal. ii, 20;—and it is *mutual*: for we are in him, and he is in us, John xv, 4, 5. He is the vine, and we are the branches, John xv, 5;—he is the head and we are the body, Col. i, 18;—he is the bridegroom, and we are the bride, Rev. xxi, 9;—and he is a foundation, and we are the living stones in his spiritual house, 1 Pet. ii, 4, 5.

2. *They die in union with the Lord.* The union of soul and body is dissolved by death; but the union of the soul with Christ remains unbroken. He is precious to the believer in that awful hour, and the death of the believer is precious in his sight, Psa. cxvi, 15. The believer cleaves to him with purpose of heart, and he cleaves to the believer in mercy and love.

3. *This union makes them blessed in death.* It *secures the presence* and *support* of their Saviour, Psa. xxiii, 4; it *fills* the soul with sacred *joy;* it *strengthens* the *hope* of the dying saint; it *brightens* his *prospects;* and gives him the victory over death. Such a death is happy beyond description, and is more to be desired than all the wealth and power of this perishing world, Num. xxiii, 10; Psa. xxxvii, 37; Isa. lvii, 1, 2.

III. THEY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS.

1. *The labours of the Christian, in the present world, are many and great.* He is engaged in a warfare, and has to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, 1 Tim. vi, 12; he has to run a race for a prize of infinite value, Heb. xii, 1; and he has a cross to bear, or a heavy load of reproaches and sufferings, in the cause of his Divine Master, Matt. xvi, 24. In these labours, he must call forth all his energies; and, at the same time, look up to the strong for strength, Isa. xl, 31.

2. *But when death comes, his work is done, and his sufferings are at an end.* His weary body, after all its toils, rests in the silent grave, Job iii, 17; and his spirit enters into that rest which remaineth to the people of God, Heb. iv, 9. How sweet is that rest! how calm and tranquil is the happy spirit, after all the storms of life! the believer shall no more be tossed on the billows of life—he has gained the haven, and is quiet, Psa. cvii, 30.

IV. AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.

1. *The works of Christians are various, important, and useful.* They carefully perform the duties of life, and provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men, 2 Cor. viii, 21;—they do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God, Mic. vi, 8; they visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, Jas. i, 27; they wash the feet of the saints, 1 Tim. v, 10; they entertain strangers, Heb. xiii, 2; are ready to every good work, Tit. iii, 1; and are careful, at all times, to maintain good works, Tit. iii, 8.

2. *Their works are known in heaven.* Jesus said to the angel of the church in Laodicea, "I know thy works," Rev. iii, 15; and it is affirmed in the book of God, that "by him actions are weighed," 1 Sam. ii, 3. They never indulged a

good thought but what was seen in heaven; they never spake a good word but what was heard in heaven; and all their works, in their commencement, progress, and termination, have been witnessed by Him, who will judge both the living and the dead.

3. *These works do not go before them, to merit heaven; but they follow after, in the rewards of grace.* Good men have humble views of their own works. They cannot fix their thoughts, with entire complacency, on any thing they ever did; but after the strictest course of obedience, they dare not claim any reward, as a matter of debt, but humbly acknowledge, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do," Luke xvii, 10. But the Lord sees with different eyes, and will reward their well-meant works: hear his words, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward," Matt. x, 42.

4. *The rewards of these works will be great and eternal.* What those rewards will be, we cannot fully say; but they will include the beatific vision of God;—the society of angels and saints;—the most exalted employments;—and the most blessed enjoyments. How pleasing the thought, that every good work of ours, however inconsiderable, will follow us into eternity; and what a strong inducement should this be to "work while it is day, for the night cometh, when no man can work," John ix, 4.

V. THESE TRUTHS ARE PLEASINGLY CONFIRMED BY A VOICE FROM HEAVEN.

1. *That which is said in heaven is faithful and true*, Rev. xix, 11. Men make promises which they never intend to perform, and assert things which are not true; "but the word of our God shall stand for ever," Isa. xl, 8. "I heard a voice from heaven, saying:"—What dignity, what solemnity, what sublimity in this voice! a voice from heaven, where all things are known, and where nothing is spoken but what will be accomplished! The words strike the mind with awe, both when the eyes see them in the book, and when the ears hear them pronounced. What must the feelings of the venerable apostle have been when he heard the solemn sound!

2. *That which the voice from heaven proclaimed, is confirmed to us by an entry in the records of truth.* The voice said, *Write.* The book of God was written for the church; and this

is a precious portion of it, not to be lost, but to be recorded for the encouragement of the faithful. Here the immortality of the soul is revealed and confirmed. It is written in the sacred volume, which will remain, when all the flimsy productions of unbelievers are buried in eternal oblivion. Those who die in the Lord, go into the eternal world, immediately after death, and their works do follow them.

3. *But the words are farther confirmed by the Holy Spirit.* "Yea, saith the Spirit;" that Spirit "who searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God," 1 Cor. ii, 10; that Spirit who inspired the prophets, 2 Pet. i, 21; who was given to Jesus without measure, John iii, 34; and who "witnesseth with our spirits, that we are the children of God," Rom. viii, 16. The Spirit of God is so wise, that he cannot be deceived himself; and so holy, that he cannot deceive others. Let us believe his testimony, for it is the testimony of God, Acts v, 3, 4.

On the whole, we should earnestly seek a vital union with Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life," John xvi, 6; we should abide in him, who is the true vine, John xv, 4; and amidst all the toils of life, we should ever keep the blessed end in view, John xiv, 1—3. Then all will be well with us, both in time and eternity.

SIGMA.

XLIX.—*The Government of the Lord God Omnipotent.*

REVELATION xix, 6.

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

THE total overthrow of Babylon, or papal Rome, is predicted in the preceding chapter; and, on the fall of that apostate church, the inhabitants of heaven unite in a song of praise in which they ascribe salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord their God, whose judgments are true and righteous. In consequence of that event, the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fall down, and worship God on his throne, saying, "Amen, Alleluia;" and a voice came out of the throne,

saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great." Then the beloved John heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters resembling the roaring of the sea, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, or loud peals of thunder, saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

I. THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH.

1. *The church of Rome reigned over the nations many ages.* Her government was so strong, that no power less than Omnipotence could overthrow it. She ruled with a rod of iron—shed the blood of saints—trampled princes under her feet—and lived in honour, ease, and luxury. Her policy was as deep as hell, her works resembled those of the devil, and her end was a lake of fire, ver. 3.

2. *But the time is at hand when it will be said,* "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen;" her *power* is *broken*, her *glory* is *faded*, her *wealth* has taken its flight, Prov. xxiii, 5; her oppressions have ceased, and she is now utterly burned with fire, chap. xviii, 8. Thus every thing which exalted itself against God, or against truth and holiness, shall be destroyed, 2 Thess. ii, 4—8.

3. *Then this song shall be sung,*—"*The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*" He has reigned in the heavenly world, and over the system of nature, ever since he created the holy angels, and the material world; but now he reigneth over men, whose rebellion against his high authority has come to an end. He reigneth in the hearts of believers; in the church, which is his spiritual kingdom; and men of every rank and degree bow down to his authority, Psa. ciii, 19.

4. *It is fit and right that the Lord God omnipotent should reign.* To prove this great truth, let us state, with clearness, the following observations. All things were *created* by the Lord God omnipotent, Rev. iv, 7;—his *wisdom* is a depth which cannot be fathomed, Rom. xi, 33;—his *power* is uncontrollable, Psa. cxxxv, 5, 6;—his *presence* is unlimited, Psa. cxxxix, 7—12;—his *justice* never swerves from what is right, Gen. xviii, 25;—his *purity* is as the light of heaven, 1 John i, 7:—his *goodness* extends to all, Psa. cxlv, 9;—and his *truth* endureth for ever, Psa. c, 5. On a view of these adorable perfections, who would not devoutly pray, "Thy kingdom come!"

5. *The government of the Lord God omnipotent is absolute.* Absolute monarchies among men are *absurd*, because all human beings are *imperfect;* but as every possible perfection meets and unites in Jehovah, it is highly proper that the whole power of

government should be placed in his hands. He may employ agents and instruments to carry on his great designs; but he should hold the reins of government, that he may guide and direct all things in wisdom and goodness, to their proper ends.

6. *And of his government there will be no end.* Mighty empires among men have come to an end. The *Assyrian*, founded by Nimrod, continued about fourteen hundred years; the *Persian*, established by Cyrus, son of Cambyses, continued about two hundred years; the *Grecian*, founded by Alexander the Great, lasted about three hundred years; the *Roman* was more extensive, and endured much longer: but they all "passed away as a flood, or as a tale that is told." Blessed, then, be the Most High, who liveth for ever, and "whose dominion is an everlasting dominion," and whose "kingdom is from generation to generation," Dan. iv, 34; Psa. cxlvi, 10.

II. His subjects should praise him, and sing alleluia.

1. The Hebrew word, הללויה, literally signifies, "Praise ye the Lord." It was often sung by the Jews in the synagogue, but is now transferred to the Christian church. An eminent writer observes, that 'this is the first time the word occurs in the New Testament;' and that 'this word being Hebrew, may be taken for the Christian church's invitation of the Jews, or Hebrews, to join with them in praising God; and being so often used here, implies that Christ shall be praised by the Jews also, now, after Rome's destruction.'

2. *The government of the Lord furnishes matter of praise to all his subjects.* It puts an end to war, and restores *peace* and order among men; it promotes human *happiness* in every possible degree; it puts an end to the *tyranny* of wicked men, sin, and the devil; it places men under the secure *protection* of almighty power; it is a *mild*, *equitable* and *holy* government; it is *firm* and stable; and its foundations are "righteousness and judgment," Psa. xcvii, 2.

3. *He should be praised for condescending to govern men.* Some men have denied the being of God, Psa. liii, 1, and others, his knowledge of human affairs, Psa. lxiii, 11; but we have indubitable proofs of his being, and comfortable assurances of his watchful care, 1 Pet. iv, 7. We admit that he is *inconceivably* great and glorious, and that it is *infinitely* condescending in him to notice the highest order of celestial spirits; but he is mindful of man, Psa. viii, 4, and he knoweth them that trust in him, Nahum i, 7.—"Praise ye the Lord."

4. *Praise him for receiving you into his kingdom.* You were

strangers and foreigners, but are now "fellow citizens with the saints," Eph. ii, 19; you entered into the kingdom by regeneration, which was a work wrought in you by the Spirit of God, John iii, 3, 6; and you now share all the privileges of the kingdom. You are highly honoured, and greatly blessed; give God the glory, and praise his holy name, Psa. cxvii.

5. *Endeavour to praise him in lofty and exalted strains.* To this end charge your memory with those Scripture phrases which express the high praises of your God. The inspired songs of Zion far exceed all other compositions in clearness, strength, and sublimity. Angels praise the Lord in lofty strains; try to imitate them, Luke ii, 14; and, ere long, you shall praise him in a higher key, with all the redeemed of the Lord, Isa. lxi, 11.

6. *Employ all your powers in his praise.* Praise him in your *hearts*, by cherishing honourable thoughts of his majesty and glory, by warm affections of love and gratitude, and by inward expressions of his goodness and mercy, Psa. ciii, 1, 2; praise him with your *lips*, by speaking honourably of his attributes, works, and ways, Psa. xxxiv, 1; and praise him in your lives, by living in all things to his honour and glory. The inanimate works of creation may be said to praise God by showing forth his greatness and glory; and when our lives abound in good works, every action speaks his praise, Psa. cxlviii, 4, 8, 9.

7. *Offer up united and loud praises.* Let these resemble "the voice of many waters," and "the voice of mighty thunderings." There is a true sublime in sound. 'The burst of thunder or of cannon, the roaring of winds, the shouting of multitudes, the sound of vast cataracts of water, are all incontestibly grand objects.'* The united praises of *one* large congregation are awfully grand; what then will be the united praises of all the servants of God, both small and great! May the whole earth *ring* with the high praises of this great and glorious Being!

8. *When the prophecy to which our text refers is accomplished, the church will praise the Lord for the utter destruction of papal tyranny.* That glorious event will put an end to dangerous error and delusion—to degrading superstition—to proud intolerance—and to vile oppression. Then truth will triumph over error, and *Dagon* fall before the ark of God; tormenting fear will be cast out; and persecution, in all its forms, will cease for ever.—"Praise ye the Lord."

9. *But even now let us praise the Lord in every state and circumstance of life.* David said, "I will bless the Lord at all

* Blair's Rhetoric.

times:" let us follow his example. We may see times of peace and times of war; times of joy, and times of grief; times of ease and times of pain; times of wealth, and times of want; and times of honour, and times of disgrace. Our circumstances in life are ever varying; but still the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. ALLELUIA.

10. *Thus employed on earth, we shall be prepared to praise the Lord for ever in the realms of light and glory.* Happy spirits in that world may serve the Lord God in ten thousand different ways; but every thing will be begun, carried on, and ended in praise. This exalted work will be an honour to the arch-angel; and the pleasure attending it will be pure and elevated beyond conception.

'What a rapturous song, when the glorified throng
In the spirit of harmony join;
Join all the glad choirs, hearts, voices, and lyres,
And the burden is, "Mercy divine!"
Hallelujah, they cry, to the King of the sky,
To the great everlasting I AM;
To the Lamb that was slain, and that liveth again,
Hallelujah to God and the Lamb!'

SIGMA.

L.—*Evangelical Obedience.*

REVELATION xxii, 14.

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

OBEDIENCE, not in a legal, but in an evangelical sense, is the narrow way leading to eternal life. We, who are fallen creatures, must not imagine that we are circumstanced as Adam was while innocent, and that we are to keep the moral law as the condition of life. No! being sinners, we have need of a Saviour, and God in infinite mercy has provided one for us, who came in our nature, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. In him, if we are believers, we are accepted of God, on the ground not of our works, but of his merits; and his Spirit is to write the law on the fleshly tablet of our hearts, and enable us to fulfil the righteousness of it, Rom. viii, 4.

This doing his commandments in a gospel sense, then, is here

intended, and to which, as professing Christians, we are under such obligations as no power can dispense with or render nugatory. Now this evangelical obedience we shall briefly describe, by the essential properties of it, without entering fully on the reward annexed; and if we faithfully practise the former, we shall most certainly secure the latter; for all such shall have a scriptural right to the tree of life, and at death shall enter in through the gates into the city.

I. THIS OBEDIENCE MUST BE SINCERE, FLOWING FROM A RENEWED HEART, SPRINKLED FROM AN EVIL CONSCIENCE. It must proceed from a sincere regard to God's authority. We must keep his commandments, because he has enjoined us to do so;—to do what he would have us for that very reason, because he has commanded us to do it, is absolutely necessary to acceptable service. When David prayed earnestly for wisdom and grace to keep God's commandments, he fixed his eye on his authority; "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes." Psalm cxix, 4, 5.

1. *This obedience proceeds from faith: this is the main principle of the Christian life.* "We walk by faith," 2 Cor. v, 9; that faith which "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi, 1. And especially from faith in Christ, without whose aid we can do nothing. John xv, 5. The apostle Paul, concerning himself, asserts, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," Gal. ii, 20. "Without faith," the faith or belief of God's revealed perfections, providence, and promises, and as it peculiarly respects the Redeemer, "it is impossible to please God," Heb. xi, 6.

2. *This obedience to the commands of God, flows also from love to him.* The apostle John says, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments," 1 John v, 3. To him we are indebted for all the blessings pertaining to life and godliness, and therefore should love him above all things, and evince the reality and strength of this affection by our obedience to his commands. Our Saviour says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words," John xiv, 23. When we truly love the supreme Lawgiver, we shall highly esteem and regard his injunctions, and delight ourselves in observing and obeying them: and when we conform to them from a principle of love, our obedience will be cheerful and active, and his precepts will be our songs in the house of our pilgrimage.

II. RIGHT OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD IS IMPARTIAL, AND WITHOUT RESERVE. We must have an equal respect to all his commands. David, concerning himself, declares, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments," Psa. cxix, 6. The apostle Peter has laid the following injunction on all Christians, "As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation," 1 Pet. i, 15. When we neglect any known duty, under pretence of performing some other duty, our obedience is spurious, and we have no due regard to the divine law, for all the commandments of God are established by the same authority, James ii, 10, 11. If we keep the precepts of God in an evangelical sense, we shall conscientiously attend to both the first and the second table duties. We shall observe to do them—all the ordinances that relate to the worship of God, as well as those which respect our fellow creatures. Piety towards God should always be connected with compassion, benevolence, justice, mercy, and charity towards men; for we must consider, that the same supreme Potentate, who has commanded us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, has also enjoined us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this important matter, unregenerate men are always deficient: but they who are accepted of God, on the ground of faith in the atonement of Christ, and made partakers of a divine nature, will perform all the duties they owe either to God or man, Mic. vi, 6. They will, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless, Luke i, 6.

III. THE EVANGELICAL KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, IS HABITUAL, CONSTANT, PERSEVERING; according to those words of Christ, "Be thou faithful unto death," Rev. ii, 10. There must be a patient continuance in well doing, Rom. ii, 7. They who endure to the end shall be saved, Matt. x, 22. They who faint not, shall reap in due time, Gal. vi, 9. Therefore, they who obey the divine commands only when they please, are much like such servants as do but what they please. Our goodness must not be like the morning cloud, and the early dew, that goes soon away, Hos. vi, 4; but we must be steady and constant in our obedience, through the whole course of our lives, whatever trials and difficulties may attend us; for, in so doing, we shall please God, in whose hand is our breath, and whose are all our ways. The apostle Paul pressed this advice on the attention of the Christians at Corinth; "My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding

in the work of the Lord," 1 Cor. xv, 58. From this passage we may learn, that it is our duty, not only to be steadfast in our obedience to God, but to advance and improve in it; with greater diligence to search out what is his acceptable will; and with more care and exactness to conform ourselves to it, endeavouring to be more entirely and unreservedly at his command; and in order to this, to have our faith more strengthened, our hope more established, our love more ardent, our zeal for his honour more vehement, our hatred of sin more fixed, our disengagements from the world more entire, and our pursuit of heaven more eager.

IV. DOING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT OF GRACE, IS DIRECTED TO HIS GLORY. True believers in performing them, aim at his glory. The apostle Paul requires this of all Christians; "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," 1 Cor. x, 31. We should, by our keeping his commandments, aim at advancing the glory of the Trinity;—the glory of the Father, who contrived the wonderful method of our redemption and salvation;—the glory of the Son, who became incarnate, obeyed the law, suffered its penalty, to procure our recovery from sin, depravity, guilt, and wretchedness, to peace, holiness, and happiness;—the glory of the Holy Spirit, who applies the valuable results of the passion of Christ to all who repent and believe the gospel. And, indeed, if we are reconciled to God the Father, by the merits of the Son, and sanctified by his Spirit, we are no longer our own, but under indispensible obligations to live to the glory and praise of all the persons in the Holy Trinity.

From this view of *obedience* to the commandments of God, we learn its nature, extent, design; under the influence of what principles it is commenced, from what motives it is conducted, and to what ends it is directed. It forms a test for examination—a rule for direction—a measure for approbation—and a source for consolation.

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